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Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Inside Jews, Inside Germany: Internalised Reconciliations

by

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Doctor of Creative Arts

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Lisa Dabscheck, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Creative Arts, in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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PREFACE

This Doctor of Creative Arts thesis has two components, which examine what it means to be a Jew in Germany during the period 2012 to 2019, framed by the Holocaust. It comprises an exegesis, which explores the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of the main section that follows, which is a creative work in the form of a hybrid non-fiction narrative and memoir.

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ABSTRACT

Inside Jews, Inside Germany: Internalised Reconciliations

What is it to live as a Jew in today's Germany? Seventy years after the end of the Holocaust, contemporary Jewish life in Germany is a phenomenon leveraged for various purposes: heralded as a triumph over the perpetrators; trumpeted as proof of their descendants' recovery; condemned as a travesty to the victims; dismissed as an anomaly, a fragile coalition of factions, as "Russian" and Israeli immigrants, together with vestiges of pre-war *Jekkes* and others endeavour to knit together vivid communities with tenuous common threads.

Between 2012 and 2019 I conducted a series of long-form and background interviews. My research delves into the inner worlds of a handful of Jews living in contemporary Germany. It removes each from their "group", approaching them singularly. With this emphasis on individuation each is asked to consider the reconciliation that takes place not in the realms of public "memory theatre" [1] or in interpersonal contexts, but in private iterations, where coming to terms with the past in the present is an ongoing personal matter, requisite to living in Germany as a Jew, and containing a multiplicity of sentiment *within* individuals, with a tendency to shift over time. I have termed this process "internalised reconciliations".

These contemporary oral histories inform the exegesis and appear in the creative artefact framed around pertinent current events that occurred during the period. These act as what I term "pivot points", whose repercussions crystallise the prevailing, latent and unfolding perspectives of these individuals. Between their interpretations I weave my point of view as a Jew married to a non-Jewish German with whom, together with our children, in 2016 I moved from Sydney to live in Munich, immersing myself in the research landscape.

This project reveals how both research and creative practice can contribute to understanding the relationship between the public and the personal through the intricate process of ongoing negotiations of identity that are provoked at the nexus between memory and present experience. The contextualised self-portraits liberate my interlocuters from the memory and associative cultures that confine them, and suggest

the dynamic ways in which Germany acts as both place of mediated residence for the Jews who live there, at the same time as its complexities reside deep inside them.

[1] Y Michal Bodemann, *Gedächtnistheater. Die jüdische Gemeinschaft und ihre deutsche*

Erfindung, Hamburg 1996

GLOSSARY

Achtung - German word for attention or caution

Altbau - old-build apartment or other buildings constructed at or before the turn of the 20th century

Apfelstreusel - apple crumble cake

Ashkenazi - Jews of central or eastern European descent

Avinu Malkeinu - Jewish song meaning “Our Father, Our King”

Bar/Bat Mitzvah - coming of age ritual comprised of reciting from the Torah together with further sacred texts and prayers, whereby Jewish boys and girls become accountable for their actions, and for understanding and interpreting the laws and argumentation of Judaism. Known as “Bar Mitzvah” for boys and conducted coinciding with the 13th birthday in all synagogues. For girls it is known as “Bat Mitzvah”. In progressive synagogues this is identical to Bar Mitzvah. In conservative and orthodox synagogues

Bat Mitzvah occurs in a limited version at the age of 12

Bei mir bist du Shayn - popular Yiddish song meaning “To me you’re beautiful”

Bimah - pulpit in a synagogue

B’Nai Brith - an international Jewish organisation for the security and continuity of the Jewish people and State of Israel, together with combating anti-Semitism

Brotzeit - German word for snack

Buba - grandmother in Yiddish

Bundeswehr - Germany’s armed forces founded in 1955

Bundt cake - cake baked in distinctive ring-shaped tin

Bundestag - the German federal parliament in Berlin

Calmeyerjuden - thousands of Jews rescued by Hans Calmeyer from the Westerbork concentration camp and elsewhere during the German occupation of the Netherlands

Cantor - singer who leads the congregation together with the rabbi in a synagogue

Challah - braided loaf eaten on ceremonial Jewish occasions

Channukah - the Jewish festival to commemorate the revolt of the Maccabees over the Syrians marked by lighting candles over eight consecutive nights

Channukkiah - Nine-branched candle holder used at the festival of Channukah

Chuppah - Jewish wedding canopy consisting of a white cloth held up by four poles. Being a pole-holder is considered an honour

Dirndl - traditional Alpine-style dress

Doppelgänger - a double of a living person

Frum - Yiddish word for devout, committed to the strict observance of Jewish law

Gastarbeiter - so-called “guest workers” with temporary permission to work, in this case referring to those who came to the then West Germany in the 1950s, 60s and early 70s, many of whom stayed

Gemeinde - community or umbrella organisation for a community in Germany

Goyishe - Yiddish word for non-Jewish

Grundschule - primary school in German

Grüß Gott - greeting used in southern Germany and Austria

Gut Shabbes - Yiddish for Shabbat Shalom, good wishes expressed to one another on Shabbat

Haftorah - a selection of the Book of Prophets read in synagogue after the Parasha

Haggadah - printed texts used on Passover to narrate the Exodus story

Halachic - according to the Halacha, the laws of Judaism as they are (variously) interpreted today

Hausmeister - apartment building general maintenance person

Hava Nagila - Israeli folk song that means “Let us Rejoice” traditionally sung at Jewish celebrations

Hora - Israeli folk dance performed in a linked circle at Jewish celebrations

Hort - Name for an after-school care centre in Germany

Jahrzeit - anniversary of a person's death

Jekke or *Yekke* - a Jew of German-speaking origin

Jude - German word for Jew

Judenrat - Jewish councils forcibly set up by the Nazis to assist in the compiling of lists for the deportation and murder of Jews

Juden Raus! - Nazi chant meaning "Jews Out!"

Judenrein - German term used by the Nazis to denote that a place, organisation or other entity was "free of Jews" *der Judenstaat* - 1896 pamphlet written by the activist, journalist and playwright Theodor Herzl, the father of modern Zionism

Jugendstil - Art Nouveau artistic movement from c. 1895 until 1910

Kaffee und Kuchen - coffee and cake traditionally eaten in Germany and Austria on weekend afternoons

Ketubah - Jewish marriage certificate

Kiddush - ceremonial blessing over wine or grape juice at Shabbat and other holy days

Kinderle - Yiddish diminutive for children

Kippah - Hebrew word for skullcap worn by Jews

Kol Nidre - Synagogue service held on the eve of Yom Kippur

Kolleg - German word for college

Kontingentflüchtlinge - literally 'quota' refugees used in various applications, in this case referring to c. 200,000 Jews who migrated to Germany from former Soviet states since 1990/91

Kristallnacht - destruction of Jewish synagogues and businesses and rounding up of Jews in concentration camps on 9 & 10 September, 1938

Lalkalé - Yiddish for sweetie

Landsmann - a person from your Shtetl or town

Laugenzöpfe - German word for plaited and salted loaves

Lokshen - Yiddish for noodles

Lox - American-Yiddish word for smoked salmon

Magen David - Hebrew for Star of David

Marmelade - German word for jam

Mazel Tov - congratulations in Hebrew

Mensch - Yiddish for gentle, kind, decent and compassionate person

Mishnah - Book of oral Jewish traditions, sometimes referred to as the “Oral Torah”

Masorti - conservative denomination of progressive Judaism

Mezzuzeh - parchment scroll in a decorative case affixed to doorposts to designate a Jewish home

Minyan - a quorum of 10 Jews in this case after a funeral to eulogise and bless the person who has died

Mitteleuropa - central Europe

Multikulti - German shorthand for multicultural

Münchner - German word for residents of Munich

Mutti - German diminutive for mother

Nestbeschmutzer - German for fouler of your own nest

Noch einen wunsch? - “Do you have another wish?” in German

Oma - German word for grandmother

Parasha - a section or passage of the Torah

Payot - forelocks worn by orthodox Jewish men

Pesach - Hebrew name for the Jewish festival of Passover, marking the Exodus story of emancipation of the Jews from slavery in ancient Egypt

Pilpul - a method of studying the Talmud via intense textual and conceptual analysis

Pinakothek der Moderne - Museum of Modern Art in Munich

Punkt - point or full stop in German

Pupkalé - Yiddish for little doll

Raus! - Out! in German

Reli - German abbreviation for compulsory religion classes in schools

Rugelach - Ashkenazi scrolled cakes usually filled with nuts or chocolate

Rosh Hashanah - Jewish New Year

Schlep - Yiddish word for to haul or carry something or oneself

Schuld - German word meaning guilt or debt

Sehnsucht - German word for intense longing

Sephardi - Jews from Spain, Portugal and other parts of mediterranean Europe and north Africa

Shabbes or *Shabbat* - the Jewish Sabbath, in Yiddish and Hebrew, respectively, which runs from sunset on Fridays until sunset on Saturdays

Shabbaton - program of education usually held to coincide with the celebration of Shabbat

Shabbat Shalom - phrase used to express good wishes to one another on Shabbat

Sheitel - wig worn as a head covering by orthodox Jewish women

Shema - a prayer that is integral to Judaism

Shoah - Hebrew word for Holocaust

Shochet - kosher butcher

Shtetl - any of numerous villages in central and eastern Europe where large Jewish populations lived before the Holocaust *Shul* - Yiddish word for synagogue

Siddur - Hebrew word for prayerbook

Silvester - German word for New Year's Eve

Sippets - croutons

Stolpersteine - ‘Stumbling Stones’ created by the German artist Gunther Demnig to commemorate Holocaust victims outside the buildings where they once lived *Talmud* - ancient text consisting of two components, Mishnah and other writings that elucidate the Torah

Teffilin - phylacteries used in prayer by orthodox Jewish men

Tikkun Olam - Jewish idea taken from the Mishnah of repairing the world through acts of kindness

Torah - the Hebrew Bible

Tracht - German for traditional local costume, here referring to Alpine-style clothing

Verminderte Schuld - reduced guilt

Vorschule - German word for pre-school

Viertel - German word for quarter or neighbourhood

Wermacht - the German armed forces of Nazi Germany from 1935 until 1945

Wies'n - Bavarian name for the Oktoberfest

Wilkommenskultur - literally "welcome culture" regarding migrants to Germany but often used in critical contexts especially since the large-scale refugee arrivals of 2015

Yarmulke - skullcap, Yiddish word for Kippah

Yehudi - Jew in Arabic

Yontef - Yiddish pronunciation of the Hebrew word for a Jewish holiday

Yom Kippur - Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the year for Jews

Zayda - Grandfather in Yiddish

EXEGESIS

Inside Jews, Inside Germany: Internalised Reconciliations

> "Every moment happens twice: inside and outside, and they are two different histories."
>
> Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

This exegesis operates between two "histories"**:** it utilises a theoretical framework drawing on Sociology, Politics and Memory Studies in order to examine the place of Jews in the context of contemporary society in Germany on the one hand; and it explores what I term the "internalised reconciliations" that Jews living in Germany are impelled to negotiate on the other. As such I ask, "How do Jews live in Germany?" and "How does Germany live in the Jews?" These are the twin questions that form the crux of this research project. They are hinged together, the two arms of the same body.

First is the *externalised* question of how Jews live in Germany. This contains the dual implications: 'How *can* Jews live in Germany?' together with 'How *do* Jews live in Germany?'. These interrogations emanate from the outsider; the observer from elsewhere who wonders how the victims *can* live in the land of the perpetrators of the Holocaust, as a moral imperative. How they *do* live there is an extension of that premise, implying how the weight of the past interferes with the circumstances that brought these Jews to Germany to live, whether by birth or migration, and which is assumed to determine the nature of their lives there. The answers to these questions are by and large explicable. Jews who live in Germany today can, with less effort than that of their interlocutors, provide the details of the highly individualised set of variables that relate to both. The circumstances of their lives, the histories of their families and the particularities of their selfascribed identities, knowledge and habits may be multifarious, but they readily address the *can* and the *do*.

It is the second question that pierces the nucleus of the first, that is the substance of this thesis, and that demands the heavy lifting. This is the question that directs itself within. How does Germany live *inside* the Jews who live in Germany? Such an investigation resides deep within the private, interior worlds of those Jews who inhabit the physical and

existential space of Germany. It is not a single enquiry, but a series of metaphysical examinations; introspective entreaties that tend not to produce stable, nor finite answers. Nevertheless, the attempt to locate answers is in and of itself the means by which the reconciliation occurs; it constitutes what I have termed the "internalised reconciliations" that I contend are requisite for each Jew living in Germany. These reconciliations occur not *between* Jews and Germans, whether on the public stage or in private realms, nor between Jews in Germany and Jews or others who live elsewhere, but rather *within* the consciousness of each Jew who lives in Germany. These meditations grapple with concerns that can be philosophical, psycho-analytical, ethical, ideological, sensory and/or existential, that can be felt to lesser or greater degrees, and that demand to be answered not once, but repeatedly.

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1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Before I elaborate my theoretical framework, I explicate here my stake in this project in order to establish how my own experience and subjectivity have informed and penetrated all aspects of its conception and execution.

I am Jewish. My maternal grandparents survived the Holocaust. My paternal great-great grandparents survived the pogroms of Belarus. My father was fourth-generation Australian. My husband is German. Our children are Jewish, Australian and German. These genealogies loom large as my primary mnemonic community and in the intimate sphere of my life. They inspired this research project.

It began one late-summer evening in early 2006 in Sydney, Australia. I met a German man, a friend of mutual friends. He had invited me for a drink that turned into dinner and another drink. We faced what we understood to be deeply ingrained lines of engagement forged in the grand political manoeuvrings of "his" country acting out its atonement in relation to its recent historical atrocities against "my" people. What that had to do with us, two individuals whose intellectual engagement and shared sense of humour was fired over the course of the evening remained hazy, even as our conversation turned to the subject that floated before us like a spectre. Earlier, we had touched on it in ways that suggested a sensory communion predicated on the interconnected nature of our backgrounds; when we chose the same salty, smoked fish from the menu and decided to share it, when I tried

out my modest Yiddish and he could just about make out what I meant, and when he conveyed a level of knowledge about Judaism that gave me to understand there was much that I needn't explain.

Now we came to the question to which all the others inexorably led, the territory between us that beckoned to be traversed. Yet when the topic arose he didn't approach it as I might have imagined. It was true that historical antecedents had been leveraged by the perpetrators of the Holocaust, he told me evenly, but, he believed, it was also the work of the national mentality via which it had been implemented. There were exceptions to this, notable ones, and the Nazis had not been supported by a majority, but, he insisted, there existed generalised tendencies in the German national character, susceptible to fixedness of thinking, respect for authority and adherence to order that, once Hitler took power, the Nazis were able to identify and exploit. These interwoven factors had enabled the Holocaust to happen. I listened for a long time before I spoke, then I took up the other side of the argument. Surely other nations harboured analogous motivations to scapegoat the Jews and be rid of them. History was instructive on that record. Yes, he agreed, but they wouldn't have executed it like the Germans did. The book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (Goldhagen 1996*)* came to my mind. I knew its premise was controversial. I was wary of any tendency I might harbour to concur. I didn't feel qualified to comment on aspects of the "German character".

Although I had known other Germans until then I had avoided Germany, not due to a generalised conviction that I shouldn't go there, but out of fear as to how I might respond to being there. The conversation that evening between the man who would become my husband and I activated the latent seeds of a heightened awareness and generalised apprehensions about Germany that I had carried with me since childhood. The simple act of falling in love was bound up in a labyrinthine set of historical forces that tied us to mostly fixed narratives. These were far greater than us; in many ways they were separate to our relationship, and yet peripherally and at times directly, they involved us intimately. That evening set the groundwork between us for mutual interrogation of our shared past and present in which we would question each other's assumptions and our own, turning over our thoughts so that together we attempted to displace the roles that might have been assigned to us. In this way we established a basis upon which to grapple with challenges that lay ahead of us, the complexity of which we did not yet grasp.

My own history was central to how I met these challenges. I grew up in Sydney, in an assimilated Jewish Australian household of the 1970s and 80s. The *Shabbas* blessings held us still for a few moments as we waited to burst upon the feast before us: a carnival of colour and life that nourished us so that the stories burst from our mouths together with laughter's tears from our eyes and the top buttons from our trousers. The synagogue was an extension of all this, a place we visited a few times a year. The Holocaust was somewhere else.

In Melbourne lived all of my family on both sides, most importantly my *Buba*. Together with her four sisters and their children, including my mother's sister Raya, 13 years her senior, they had survived moving deeper into Ukraine and Crimea from their home town of Lvov in what was then Russia. In 1941, they escaped from the city of Melitopol near the border to Crimea before the 2,000 Jewish residents who remained there were murdered by the Nazi mobile paramilitary death squad *Einsatzgruppe D*. The two brothers and the husbands of the five sisters were at war in the Russian army; one of them was a general. Some of these men died, others survived, one returned blind. Raya's father, *Buba*'s first husband, was killed on the front. *Buba'*s second husband Samuel, my *Zayda*, was a journalist who was brought up in an orthodox family in the town of Mława. He survived as a soldier in the Polish army. His first wife and their son were rounded up with other Jews and shot dead.

My *Buba* and *Zayda* met at war's end in Russia. A year later my mother was born in Kiev. They moved around Poland searching for *Zayda's* family. They found no-one. Like other displaced persons, they made their way to Paris, where they waited for two and a half years for visas to America which never materialised. America had closed its doors. The Australian Jewish Welfare and Relief Society (AJWS) and a *Landsmann* from Mława sponsored their passage to Australia. In Poland *Zayda* had been an active member of the Jewish socialist movement, the "Bund", in which he continued to participate in Melbourne. In 1964, at the age of 54 he died of a heart attack nearly a decade before I was born. At his *Minyan* my mother inadvertently learned what had never been spoken of until then.

When we visited Melbourne twice a year, an overnight trip in which my brother and I slept in the boot of our station wagon wedged in by suitcases, I tried in my shy way to learn more than those hard-won facts wrested from what Diana Pinto calls "the realm of private Jewish grief". (Pinto 1999, p.2) My *Buba* fed me with faint fragments then changed the

subject, swatting away the rest from her immaculate kitchen, where cabbage rolls or borscht with their sweet-meaty scents would be simmering on the stove. In those times, the stories were felt more than they were told. In the dining room there was tea in the samovar; in the living room a gramophone played songs that took me to places that filled me with a nostalgia I couldn't dispel. Entering her flat was the world of my imagination made flesh. In her bedroom was a framed monochrome photograph of *Zayda* on the table beside his bed, which my *Buba* made fresh each morning. On the dressing table were bottles of perfume, a silver-backed brush and matching comb, the red lipstick in its mirrored case that she painted onto her lips in bows so that she looked like one of the movie stars in the old films I loved to watch. In her face was love. I felt it brush against mine when she kissed my cheeks and called me by my diminutives; *Lisalé*, *Lalkalé*, *Pupkalé*.

****

A month after our all-night conversation, I invited Simon to celebrate *Pesach* and by extension to be acquainted with the particular "Jewishness" of my own family. My mother and stepfather welcomed him warmly, explaining the rituals, urging him to feel at home. As usual there was an atmosphere of convivial chaos for this dinner that habitually stretches late into the evening in which the traditions of Passover are not only remembered but re-enacted, guided typically by mismatched *Haggadahs* (special prayerbooks filled also with songs and interactive elements involving items of food that relate to various aspects of the Exodus story of the Jews' enslavement in, and emancipation from, ancient Egypt). No household I've known seems to have a complete set of these, so that there is recurrent, friendly uproar – which itself forms part of the atmosphere – about which page we're on and whether we should have already dipped the bitter herbs into the salt water to represent the hardship and the tears. Synchronous with this is generally good-natured dissent as to the benefits of the short version or the long. All of these threads are intensified by escalating desires in anticipation of the feast that will materialise at the far end of such reckonings.

I glanced at Simon during the evening, watching his face transform from the expression of solemnity that anticipation of such an event based on religious ritual might muster among the uninitiated, to the relief that comes with the far more congenial reality. Later he would marvel that he had grasped something about progressive Judaism to which he had never

been exposed in Germany: “It’s like Pick ’n’ Mix”, he suggested affectionately, “You can take whichever elements fit best to your philosophy and beliefs and adapt them.” I grinned at his observation and recognised in it how lightly I carried it; an extension of my tolerant, enlightened family that I took for granted. That this did not universally hold true was also demonstrated that *Pesach* evening. As usual, extension tables had been set up to accommodate an assortment of guests; family, friends and out-of-towners. One of the latter, whom we had never previously met, nor have we seen him since, was the American brother-in-law of my mother’s closest childhood friend. It was a typically convoluted connection to someone whom, by dint of my mum’s generosity, can end up at a family dinner in a home like mine. Before we began, he had chatted amiably with Simon. After a while he became curious about Simon’s accent, whose traces of his mother tongue had all but dissipated. “By the way, where are you from?” the man asked. “South Africa? New Zealand? I can’t tell.” When he heard Simon’s reply he was dumbstruck. He turned, wordlessly, and walked to the other side of the room. My initial reaction was indignation on Simon’s behalf, followed by bemusement that such a response could emanate from the presence of the German boyfriend of the Jewish hosts’ daughter, at Passover. Later, I reflected, his action could be taken as instructive in terms of the way Germans can be viewed from afar, collectively culpable, even in subsequent generations, frozen in time in the post-Holocaust new world.

In the weeks and months that followed I found analogous responses from certain acquaintances. The collective accusation seemed to hinge on the notion that Jews and Germans no longer belonged together. “What did my family think?” they wanted to know. Our feelings, and those of our parents about our respective Germanness and Jewishness did not conform to prevailing stereotypes. Our grandparents variously did not neatly fit the roles of victims and perpetrators, although these contained some elements of truth. By then we had begun to understand how our relationship would be nonetheless marked and shaped by our shared and separate histories. Since then we have traversed it in all conditions, an odyssey with no fixed destination. In the process, as the thread of memoir running through the creative artefact attests, I confounded my own expectations. My deepening relationship with this German man, whom my mother gave the highest accolade as a “*mensch*”, compelled me to properly engage with my Jewishness, something I had carried around with varying degrees of affection, malaise and nonchalance, and with a sense of ownership that had more to do with inheritance than engagement.

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At the end of 2006 we went to Germany for the first time with my two older children from a previous relationship. Simon's parents welcomed us into their house in the Bavarian countryside that looked like it could have been made from marzipan and gingerbread. Outside, snow laid its magical blanket over Hitler's favourite part of Germany. At the station I saw you could catch a train to Dachau, a town 25 minutes away where people lived now as they had then, with the walled shadow of the concentration camp forming a background and perimeter to their everyday life. In Berlin I found that the traumas of the past weren't iced over or fenced off. They were hung all around like old wallpaper whose ghosts tapped me on the shoulder. My sense of Jewishness coursed through me like electricity that powered a light with two settings: on/off. It struck me for the first time in my life as a question I found myself compelled to face and answer.

Another question formed in my open mouth: "How do you live in Germany as a Jew?" The answer was set in motion in the summer of 2012, when we went back to Germany for our fifth visit. This time we were there with all four children including our 18-monthold twins for a three-month stay. It was my first research trip in the field, the cornerstone of this project, whose timing, as is clarified in Section 3, "Pivot Points", turned out to be critical for the substance of my research and prescient for the trajectory of events that would follow.

In the meantime it was being widely touted that Germany had "the fastest-growing Jewish population in Europe" (Crossland 2012). The sensational irony associated with Jews "re-inhabiting the land of the perpetrators" provided irresistible international headlines. That this "fact" was shortly to be, if not already no longer true was obscured for some time. When I came across an article quoting an Israeli artist saying that Germany was "the safest place to live as a Jew" all the ingredients were assembled for an affirmation of Jewish life in Germany laid out against transnational disapproval. I found the source of that quote, interviewed him, and my project was set in motion.

On an intermingled personal level, our time there precipitated my next question: Could we live in Germany? It's true that I was guided in part by an abiding desire to live in Europe, the cultural cradle that embodied my passions for literature, music, theatre, cinema, art. Yet the prevailing impulse was more elemental; I felt a determination to implant myself in the place I feared most; whose history had chilled me since childhood; that formed part of my husband's and children's identities; and in which my Jewishness could no longer

operate in various modes of ambivalence. I had to face the past. It had been living with me for as long as I could remember, obscured beneath layers of nostalgia for Europe, tattooed into the letters “KZ” under the hairs of my Uncle Erwin’s (my Auntie Raya’s husband’s) forearm, and experienced in a certain feeling of displacement in Australia. The deeply ingrained sense of history and social justice I had developed at home led me to the place from whence for generations all of my ancestors lived, survived and ultimately fled. My relationship with my soon-to-be husband acted as repository for these internalised tensions that appeared to have been fomented in preparation for just such a moment, stirring them into a cold soup. The aromatics and bones were in the pot, but as one would say in Yiddish, it had no “*Tum”*. It was bland. The water was still cold. I needed to turn up the heat and to season it. Now it was time to unravel the bundle of identity and memory I carried with me; to emplace myself, to live *in* it.

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In the late summer of 2016 we moved to Munich. It was there, in the “*Heimatstadt*” (“homeland-city”) of the Nazis, that for the first time in my life I would properly grasp what it was to be a Jew. Not in terms of extra religious instruction or further acquaintance with culture, traditions or community, quite the contrary. Rather according to my willingness to actively embody what it is to be Jewish in an environment that according to my moralideological-emotional compass seemed to demand it. This personal transformation took place in a landscape where, as already elucidated, Jewishness tends to be an anomaly magnified far beyond the scope of its tangible presence. As a Jew in Germany I found myself recurrently made to feel “special”, “other” and “compelling” in both “positive” as well as unsettling, if not negative, applications. Here I found Jewish contexts to be so slight that, outside of modest religious settings that tended to be orthodox, or cultural events that were most appreciably frequented by non-Jews, I was compelled to construct my own Jewish world around myself and for my children in a place where Jewish life felt to me shrouded and obscure. In the absence of my family, childhood and adult friends whose collective Jewishness infers intimacy and understanding, I found myself not only in a void of familiarity, but more particularly in a relative vacuum of Jewishness that, due to the history, was especially disturbing. My lack of religiosity meant that to immerse myself through the usual channel of the synagogue, a place to which under normal conditions I visit a handful of times each year, would have felt disingenuous.

All of that needed to be balanced with my desire to establish an existence immersed in broader German society, the “integration” into which, also extrapolated in the creative artefact, comprised our first and most pressing imperative. Given that Simon is German and we were there voluntarily, this entailed a profoundly different frame of reference than such a contested term might invoke. Yet it still meant furthering my proficiency with the German language, itself requisite to the visa that allowed me to stay, together with my own imperative, in spite of the historical connotations, to be fluent in both language and local idioms, whether articulated, enacted or implied. It meant adapting myself to a cultural landscape that in its generalised insistence on rules and blunt binaries was starkly foreign to me not only as a Jew but as an easygoing, open to compromise, cheeky Australian.

In our first year in Germany I did not join a synagogue. Outside of my research I met very few Jews. The twins, now five years old, attended our local inner-city primary school, where out of 400 students, two were Jewish: ours. As the circle closed on that year and opened on the next, I observed how my husband and long-since bilingual children were becoming ever-more immersed in the dominant external landscape that, I realised, would soon sweep everything into its mouth. Unless I created and embodied Jewish spaces and experiences of some kind, there would be none. I called my mother and asked for her chopped liver recipe. I wrote to the Jewish school. I applied to join the reform synagogue. The consequences of these acts on my burgeoning sense of Jewishness, as well as the enrichments and challenges they provoked within my relationships with my husband and children, are vividly explored in the creative component. I did not become more religious, yet I became much more Jewish. So began my awakening and its impacts on the orientation of my family; provoked by my deeply held needs and stimulated by Germany’s terrain, whose Jewishness was most profoundly marked by its absence.

As the historian Diana Pinto writes:

> The coming to the fore of Jewish themes in our pluralist democratic societies has thus opened the way for ever larger Jewish Spaces, in particular in countries that carry the ‘presence of the absence’ such as Spain, Portugal, Poland and above all Germany. There the Jewish absence is an integral part of the national histories and as such can easily lead to a museum type vision of dead or expelled Jews,

the equivalent of putting so many *menorahs* on a shelf. Only living Jews can turn the Jewish Space into a locus of creativity, one that can powerfully contribute to a future oriented Europe. The difference is quite simply that between taxidermy and biology. (Pinto 1999, ibid, p.1)

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE

In this section I elucidate the four interrelated themes that underpin this project. These are: Ideas of **Home and Belonging** in the post-Holocaust place that is prone to being characterised as inherently antithetical to both;
Concepts of **Identity** in an environment characterised by absence and correlated limited understandings of contemporary individuation of Jews;
Memory and Musealisation whereby representations that tend towards generalisation and "ossification" are pervasive and severely circumscribe collective and individual understandings together with the operation of memory in the present;
Anti-Semitism in a context where responses to such phenomena tend to be sensitised, intensified and extrapolated for various purposes.

In the creative work I address these themes through what I identify as five "pivot points"; that is controversial public events that profoundly ruptured this landscape during the research period, illuminating and compounding these concerns.

These are:

1. 2012: Circumcision debate
2. 2014: Nazi slogans at *Al Qud's* Day Rally, Berlin
3. 2015: Arrival of one million Syrian and other refugees into Germany
4. 2017: German national election – AfD political party elected to parliament
5. 2018: *"Kippah* attack" and appointment of "Anti-Semitism Commissioners"

In this way the creative work operates as a matrix whereby the four themes operate and intensify over time across each of the "pivot points" and their afterlife. My discussion of the themes below also contextualises the rationale for my selection of these "pivot points". The events themselves are further explicated in Section 3, later in the exegesis.

In both exegesis and creative work I draw on a range of interdisciplinary sources that have informed my arguments. As a journalist I kept abreast of the comprehensive gamut of public writing about these issues in Germany and abroad. I also relied upon texts that addressed Jewish scholars' own reflections on their subjectivity and scholarly practice as both models for writing and tools of analysis.

Introduction to key themes

As noted previously, this doctoral project examines a key aspect of the nature of postHolocaust Jewish life in present-day Germany; namely, how individual Jews internalise the terms of their extant lives, repeatedly negotiating them according to complex personalised reckonings. This process is framed in an external landscape in which the memories of the past intrude into the present even as both are transformed through this process. Despite elemental socio-political shifts in Germany in the seven decades since the end of the Holocaust, its reverberations can still be felt as a meta-narrative to Jewish life in Germany. They are experienced as collective or contested memories that periodically enter public spaces, appearing in new but familiar or correlated forms. Jews can now be said to exert themselves in Germany, to various degrees, with an intensified measure of engagement within the broader population and its collective preoccupations, which itself routinely amplifies Jewish "concerns". These, I contend are parlayed into private spaces where they are synthesised and interpreted via internalised processes, where my research suggests they can be meaningfully understood.

With an official population of 110,000 and an unofficial population thought to be 200,000 - 250,000, Jews in Germany occupy a markedly more tangible physical space than at any other time in the post-Holocaust period, even as they comprise just 0.02 per cent of Germany's overall population of 82 million. It should also be noted that these numbers are falling slightly due to correlated elements of low birth rates and an ageing population (Sobotka 2017). These statistics, however, obscure the complexity of both "visibility" and "invisibility" in relation to Jews in Germany.

Contemporary Germany can be distinguished from earlier junctures in the post-Holocaust period, when "ordinary" Jews (i.e. those not visible in the public sphere due to their official or other roles) were routinely said to be "invisible" and referred to themselves as "living on packed suitcases" a metaphor that expressed the self-perceptions and underlying motivations, if not always the manifest realities, of the transitory nature of their existence in Germany. This generalised resistance to committing to life in Germany even when many ultimately stayed for the duration or remainder of their lifetimes, together with their relative imperceptibility among no more than 30,000 Jews in Germany until as recently as the early 1990s (Körber 2014) held them to a far greater extent than today as separate to the greater

population, perhaps most tellingly in their own minds. Although the relationship between Jews and Germans can still be described as conditional and disjointed and the Jewish population remains small, the generalised shift from “preparing to leave” to “endeavouring to stay” entails an altered set of realities in which Jews may be said to be more inclined to confront and reckon with the externalised conditions that meaningfully shape their lives, a circumstance that reflects this stronger commitment to staying in Germany despite ongoing individual and collective ambivalences within it, at the same time as shifts towards greater engagement with, and self-determination in the broader society occur.

Overshadowing their physical presence, there exists an appreciable figurative space in which the very existence of Jews in Germany is regularly extolled as “a litmus test of German democracy” (JFDA 2018) and where attacks on Jews are invoked as “an attack on us all” (Klein 2019) according to the expediencies of political rhetoric. Flaccid as such proclamations may seem, they trickle down to create an atmosphere in which Jews are encouraged to live comfortably in Germany, as witnessed in countless such political proclamations to this effect and manifestly in the gesture of inviting an estimated 216,000 (Deutscher Bundestag 2019) Jewish so-called contingency refugees into Germany coinciding with the fall of the states of the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, even as this act precipitated significant challenges for pre-existing Jewish populations in Germany. These communities, while finding themselves now dramatically outnumbered, were charged with assimilating these “New Jews” – a term that expresses not only their newness in Germany but their newness as (post-communist) Jews – into their folds. This circumstance was exacerbated given that, according to Jewish laws of matrilineal descent that were overlooked by the German government according to its constitutional or other considerations, many were not deemed by these communities to be Jewish. As such they were forced to convert in order to join congregations or slipped into “nether spaces” between Jewish and German life. Nevertheless, these political acts and others form an environment in which Jews are routinely assured that they should feel welcomed, protected and safe, and where they are encouraged to play active roles in society, ostensibly not only predicated on their being Jewish.

Jews in Germany live, separately and collectively, in a history-scarred landscape that offers them schizophrenic responses to the past as it is enacted in the present, alternately reassuring and excluding them in ways that demand to be reconciled. If we accept the aforementioned premise that Jews in Germany now demonstrate, notwithstanding

unpredictable personal or political future developments, a generalised willingness to stay, then their preparedness to do so is predicated on negotiating with themselves the terms on which this is possible. My research explores the notion that individual Jews in Germany work towards developing their self-actualisation in terms of identifying and working through the individual conditions of their existence in relation to the after-effects of current and political events and their discourses, a phenomenon which remains relatively unexplored.

The form taken by the "internalised reconciliations" I refer to is heavily mediated by individualised perspectives which are notable for their heterogeneity. However, the testimonies I have amassed through qualitative interviews as a whole attest to the idea that, if a shared thread can be said to exist, it is the felt knowledge that this was a nation that attempted to exterminate all Jews. To live in Germany as a Jew is to live in direct proximity to that knowledge. In real terms this entails speaking the language of the perpetrators, living in their buildings or at least in the landscapes where they resided, and adopting their customs for the purposes of dealing with everyday life. Some of these landscapes have been reconfigured to reflect the prevailing culture of externalised sociopolitical reconciliation between Germans and Jews, in the form of memorial places and museums, revivified synagogues and other expressions of cultural so-called *Wiedergutmachung,* a contested compound term that refers to the dubious notion of "making good again". Nonetheless living in Germany as a Jew means being in sustained contact with sites of collective memory, whereby sensory experiences sharply colour the shape and texture of life, reactivating memories and their associated psychological-emotional responses (Tumarkin 2005). Living here as a Jew means engaging with individuals and institutions that carry vestiges, both inferred and implied, of the past, and attempting to synthesise these into a sustainable normality. Jews in Germany are obliged to do so even as they are conspicuously charged with the task of asserting their presence here and protecting it; and also with defining and enacting the terms of their self-determination in a territory that, despite manifold efforts towards atonement, remains geographically and metaphysically scarred. My research reveals how this fractured landscape enters the private sphere so that, I contend, each Jew who lives in Germany is compelled to hold pieces of it in their hands, to shape and reshape, or indeed unravel it. In this sense my question illuminates to what extent and in which forms contemporary Jewish identity in Germany continues to be shaped by the Holocaust, without which it arguably cannot by conceived. Every Jew, irrespective of origin, religious or cultural orientation, is compelled in Germany to contend with the post-trauma of the Holocaust

that unavoidably underlies Jewish life in Germany at the same time as it merges with new challenges.

The process of untangling could be said to involve new forms of *Vergangen-heitsbewältigung,* the notion of working through or coming to terms with the past. This invented compound term first appeared in the late 1950s and was ascribed to Germans living in the aftermath of the Holocaust (Elon 1967 p. 121). In his lecture on November 9, 1959, 11 years after *Kristallnacht*, the German-Jewish philosopher Theodor Adorno controversially rejected the assumption that this concept was genuinely at work in society as a mechanism of critical self-analysis, instead suggesting it was a means via which Germans could distance themselves from the hard work of introspection upon which genuine transformation would be predicated. (Adorno 1959).

For the objectives of this research I find this term, in a repurposed form, useful to suggest how each Jew living in Germany must find subjective methods with which to "work through" living in the present with this omnipresent past. In this sense I imply an authentic engagement commensurate with the metaphysical meaning of the term as Adorno identifies it *in absentia*.

Theme 1: Home and Belonging

> ***"***Homesick for what?
> When I say "homesick", I say "dream".
> Because the old homeland hardly exists.
> When I say homesickness, I mean a lot:
> What long pressed us in exile.
> Now we are strangers in our hometown.
> Only the "ache", it remained.
> The "home" is gone."
> (Mascha Kaléko, 1975)

When I examine the question of how life feels for the individual Jew in today's Germany I do so with the awareness that this topic has been addressed variously in Jeffrey Peck's *Being Jewish in the New Germany* (Peck 2006) as well as in Y Michal Bodemann's *A*

Jewish Family in Germany Today (Bodemann 2005) and in Yascha Mounk's *Stranger in My Own Country* (Mounk 2013). This question of "how" Jews make their homes in contemporary post-Holocaust Germany, and "who" they are, is, according to these key works, among others, not new as such. All three publications critically inform my work and act as explication to the detail of historical-political questions from 1945-2012 which may arise for the reader when exploring this territory for the first, or at a subsequent time. Together they comprise an encyclopaedic tool for this purpose, granting me scope in my own work to set about the excavation of "within" that characterises and, with the exception of Bodemann, differentiates my approach.

Peck's method is forthright and explanatory. He presents a detailed overview of the trajectory of Jewish life in Germany from after the Holocaust until the early 2000s and presages key concerns that remain apposite today. Where Peck occasionally appears as "I" in the text it tends to be with reference to facts and figures, or to elements of personal acquaintance he wishes to emphasise. More notable is his "presence" in the tone of his presentation, which, in the spirit of his hybrid style of contemporary history and reportage, is sharply coloured by his own views, although these do not delve further into the personal. He moves at times to philosophical musings which conjure key issues that relate to how the individual Jews might attempt to enact their self-determination against the reverberations of the past, particularly in terms of physical and existential space, where terms like *Heimat* (loosely translated as homeland, but suggesting something more sensory and ephemeral) carry inherited trauma, even as they are now re-invoked into more common, albeit contentious usage. He explores how this, among other factors, inhibits the attempts at inter-personal reconciliation between Jews and Germans to which he refers here:

> The specifically German notion of *Heimat* is still inflected with the semantics of racial exclusion identified with the Nazi era and may therefore never take hold ... For Jews in Germany, homeland ... remains ... an unachievable or at least an ambiguous goal ... The shadow of German history to this day darkens even the most optimistic efforts towards reconciliation (Peck 2006, p.160).

And yet Peck allows a modified possibility, incorporating the notion of a reciprocal contribution from contemporary Germans:

> While *Heimat* may not fit the Jewish experience in Germany today, it does not mean that Jews in Germany are not making a different kind of home. This diaspora process affects both the self-definition of Jews, indigenous and newly arrived, as well as the German non-Jewish populations' perception of the minorities and themselves. And for both sides it means a changing conception of Germanness, Jewishness and home itself (ibid, p.10).

This analysis sets the groundwork in this sense for my own work, which goes beyond what I identify as the primary level of reconciliation, that is *externalised* acts of reconciliation in political and social settings, as well as what I term secondary forms of reconciliation, namely interactions for this purpose that are set up or occur *between* Jews and Germans (Krondorfer 1995), to consider a tertiary sphere, namely how reconciliation plays out within the interior worlds of individual Jews living in Germany that I refer to as "*internalised* reconciliations".

Bodemann's work, published at around the same time as Peck's, adopts a far more personal methodology, as noted, founded on a series of interviews he conducted with members of a single extended pseudonymous family of Holocaust survivors and their children, with Polish antecedents. After an explanatory introduction which frames the work in historical-socio-political time and space and provides snippets of the personal impressions we will later encounter, Bodemann presents the testimonies in abridged or synthesised form, so that the text comprises key elements of numerous hours of interviews he conducted, typically separated by individuals or pairs of individuals who are introduced in each chapter by Bodemann, and whose testimonies are occasionally interspersed with his interview questions. Otherwise they appear without commentary. This enables the interviewees to speak more or less without prompting or interruption and secures Bodemann's position as investigator, although this term may imply something more pointed than his intent, which is conveyed with much respect and sensitivity. Instructively with regard to my own work, his approach also emphasises the individuation of the responses of each of his interviewees in what he calls "a *multiple biographical portrait*" (Bodemann 2015, p.32).

> I describe it as a multiple portrait because it is (a) like a group portrait in art, a set of individuals portrayed simultaneously in relation to others; (b) those

> portrayals are co-productions; they are my portraits based on their own selfpresentations as connected to me; (c) as they have attempted to portray themselves they are also participating with me … This approach belies the notion that Jews living in Germany today – even those with nearly identical socioeconomic and cultural origins – would all have to arrive at the same appraisal of their situation, with congruent identities. (ibid, p.33)

While my research takes its impetus from Bodemann's personalising of communal concerns via his presentation and differentiation of individual narratives as "multiple portraits", in his case of familial subjects, it finds new expression in three key ways: (i) in the explication of individual narratives from a broader scope of ethno-social reference as framed against responses to the series of public events and debates and their private receptions that shape the trajectory of the narrative; (ii) in the inclusion of my own perspective as autoethnographic/authorial contributor where I insert myself into the research as participant and self-interviewee, situating my own responses as foil and guide to the others; and (iii) in the emphasis on the aforementioned research principle of investigating the dimensions of "internalised reconciliation". These factors exert special pertinence at the pivotal moment at which this research occurs, namely at a temporal juncture of marked socio-political change sparked by the circumcision debate of mid2012, which is the setting-off point for my investigation.

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As illuminated by Mounk (2013), first and even subsequent encounters between Jews and Germans can be highly charged. His work clarifies, even at the fairly recent moment of his writing, the tendency to emphasise notions of Jews vis à vis Germans with predominantly Christian beliefs and/or origins as fundamentally and recognisably "different". Via both personal anecdote and scholarly explication he demonstrates how these exacerbate notions of "co-existence" between the two "groups" in a metaphysical environment that continues to perpetuate vestigial victim-perpetrator dichotomies, whether in old or new forms.

> It's not that my class grew hostile. Not did they start hurling anti-Semitic slurs at me. What they did was subtler, though over time, equally alienating; they came to see me as a strange and slightly mysterious outsider who wasn't

> bad, necessarily, but who also most definitely wasn't really a part of their community. To mention that I was a Jew was enough to make sure that I would never be one of them. (Mounk 2013 p.70)

My research further explores how one's sense of being Jewish in Germany today has a tendency to be amplified in a way that can feel alienating and disproportionate, even as it might compel each Jew to confront the nature of their individual identity and identifications as such. One can feel tasked with filling a post-Holocaust vacuum with the experience of interacting with at least one Jew who is alive. For the Jew this can include grappling with received stereotypes and attempting to assert competing narratives. One may be prized as a curiosity, a collector's item, a souvenir, or as a remnant of an annihilated intelligentsia that is still, in some quarters, revered. As elsewhere in the world, Jews can be victimised as proxy for Israel (or its current administration), a phenomenon that carries particular resonance in Germany. Or you can provide an opportunity for individual Germans to enact their redemption fantasies; you can be a mirror to somebody's recovery, a recipient of their unasked for confession, or a trigger to "play nice", among myriad other assignations.

Such variants of distancing can subsume the possibilities of belonging that are suggested by sharing collective physical and figurative spaces in post-Holocaust contemporary Germany.

> [Belonging] should be analysed both as a personal, intimate feeling of being "at home" in a place (place-belongingness) and as a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/ exclusion. (Antonsich 2010, p 644)

The existence of such weighted responses means that in Germany the individuated decision as to whether to reveal one's Jewishness with openness or hesitation, whether to deny or keep it hidden, and indeed whether to attempt to "explain" its dimensions, if such an endeavour is possible, can materialise like a weapon one feels obliged to carry.

As a Jew in Germany you may also bring to these encounters your own "baggage". Although the "packed suitcase", that was for decades not only a figurative notion but a "flight bag" kept ready in the hallway for emergency escape, may have been dispensed

with, there is a likelihood, testified to in the narrative interviews, that Jews in Germany as elsewhere harbour some degree of inherited animosity towards Germany. In the case of those who migrated from former Soviet states including the GDR, this might not have been inherited but rather acquired via acquaintance with education about the Holocaust, and prevailing public narratives in Germany.

> The Russian-speaking Jews who come here have different memory, different persecution, different nightmares. It's not Hitler, it's not Holocaust, for most of them it's Stalin. No school would teach anything about the Holocaust. It was just "in these Jewish camps". My family didn't know anything about this. It was quite late when we heard about this. I learned about it when I came here. (Interview, Alina Gromova)

Even for German-born Jews there can be a tendency to experience vestiges of the past in the present that make notions of belonging or homeland in Germany to some degree constrained, particularly when the latter is translated in German to the contested term *Heimat*, a condition that applies to numerous other terms loaded for Jews with traumatic *Nachleben* (afterlife) (Warburg 1911).

In his novel *Kalooki Nights*, the novelist Howard Jacobson introduces the suggestion that certain German terms might be best excised from the post-Holocaust lexicon:

> You don't say 'gassed' to Jews if you can help it. One of those words. They should be struck out of the human vocabulary for a while, while we regroup, not for ever, just for a thousand years or so – gassed, camp, extermination, concentration, experiment, march, train, rally, German. Words made unholy just as ground is made unholy. (Jacobson 2006)

The stain of history means that, far more than personal associations, being Jewish in post-Holocaust Germany carries symbolic connotations that can impede a sense of belonging even where it may be sought. For some Jews elsewhere it can symbolise an affront to the memory of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, which can make living as a Jew, specifically in Germany, pointedly offensive. The notion that Jews can find homes and some sense of belonging in Germany, albeit in highly individualised terms, interferes with established transnational notions that Germany is essentially a Jewish cemetery fundamentally antithetical to harbouring Jewish life. Through softer yet

analogous lenses it can be viewed as an act of foolishness, a tempting of fate, a fatal error re-made. Such views are compounded by a fairly widespread idea among members of orthodox communities that the assimilation of pre-war Jews in Germany, Austria and elsewhere was a precursor to the Holocaust, even its cause, based on the notion that any "watering-down" of Judaism is inherently fatal. According to this thesis Jews should not try to become like the populations of the countries that host them; they are not like them; they do not "belong" because they are inherently "other"; a prognosis that perversely mirrors the experience many Jews have in Germany today. Moreover, there exists the more broadly held belief that in any case Jews should not live in Europe, a continent that has consistently rejected, persecuted and murdered Jews for millennia. On that basis, Jews who do so are responsible for their own inevitable demise, which compromises Jews everywhere.

These narratives can impinge on the self-perception of Jews in Germany, forcing another thread into their internalised entanglements, whereby they may perceive themselves as being forced to justify their presence there to Jews in other places (Knobloch 2012); feeling under pressure to leave (Toppa 2015) or contributing to their own individual, or other Jews', collective insecurity.

Against these narratives of interrogation, living as a Jew in Germany can also symbolise a form of vindication over the perpetrators, a sense of asserting what could not be extinguished; testimony to the extraordinary trajectory of the survival of the Jewish people encapsulated in the title, at least, of Richard C. Schneider's history of Jews in Germany since 1945, *Wir Sind da!* (*We are here!* Schneider 2000). Yet when reiterative current events suggest that Jewish life in Germany may be conditional on sacrificing self-determination in favour of conforming to the belief systems and imperatives of the whole, these may be difficult to sustain, a set of circumstances that might be implied by Schneider's recent emigration to Israel. Still, a muddied sense of victory can still be ascribed in some cases, to the decision to live in Germany as a Jew.

> When I am here, I am aware that I am here. I feel very much the Jew in the lion's den. I feel the need to reconcile my Germanness and my Judaism. I'm trying to heal a split inside myself and I have the realisation that I belong here. I am one of the perpetrators as well as one of the victims. I am here full of anger which I cannot express. (Interview, Ken Speyer)

Jews are often aware of the potential uses and perspectives they offer and engender (often involuntarily) to others in Germany. Generally speaking one may endeavour to ignore, accept or resist aspects of them. As my research illustrates, such resistance requires particular engagement, the outcomes of which can be rewarding or counter-productive. Key to the problem, as suggested earlier, is that Jews feature so prominently in the German collective post-Holocaust consciousness in figurative terms, yet so many Germans don't personally know many, or any living Jews. Meanwhile both Jews and others elsewhere may have limited or prejudiced understandings about the nature of their lives in Germany. As long as these factors are in play Jews are likely to continue experience complicated relationships with the notions of "Home" and "Belonging" in Germany, a physical and metaphysical space in which they continue to be fetishised or discredited as emblems for whichever purpose fits. With this project I attempt to address the felt dimensions of these phenomena by giving scope and depth to individual voices, many of which may not otherwise be heard.

Theme 2. Jewish Identity

> What is this religion that isn't one and makes its claims felt on the unbelievers? What meaning can the word *Jew* carry when it no longer signifies a faith or affiliation? … The Jewish people don't know what they are. Only that they exist, and that their disconcerting existence blurs the boundary, inaugurated by modern reason, between the public and the private. (Finkielkraut 1980)

As may be well known elsewhere, unlike other religions where self-identification might suggest adherence to a set of religious beliefs, it's very much possible to be semi-observant or irreligious while remaining "culturally" Jewish. Encounters with the "shades" of progressive, agnostic or atheistic Judaism are noticeably rarer in Germany. This gap in acquaintance can be particularly apparent when one attempts to identify Jewishness not in terms of a religion that can be equated with the primary German faiths of Catholicism or Protestantism, but as a deeply felt cultural identity that, while intrinsically borne out of religion, can be only peripherally religious, or not religious at all. As such it may be more akin to a sensory cocktail of belonging better understood by Germans according to the original idea of *Heimat* (that aforementioned contested notion that was

tainted by the Nazis and has been controversially reclaimed in recent years by the political right) in this case not in terms of connection to a particular historical and geographical homeland (with the qualified exception of Israel), but to a set of portable experiences and associations that pertain to cultural beliefs, inherited rituals and other expressions that tend to be transmitted in sensorial ways. These conditions are complicated further by the intricacy of one's own set of parameters around personal notions of Jewish identity. In contemporary forms, it is not unusual to choose which aspects to keep, discard or refashion, none of which necessarily weakens the identification; often to the contrary.

As explored in the previous section, the limited acquaintance of so many Germans with so few Jews means that there is a tendency as a Jew in Germany to become a representative; an ambassador of sorts, an educator at times, and often a receptacle for a given German's repository of ideas about Jews, with particular reference to their identities. These ideas are likelier than not to have been received primarily via "dead" educational mechanisms in musealised representations (as will be explored in Theme 3) or in forms such as school textbooks or manuals that may be interpreted by teachers likely to be personally unacquainted with living Jews (as depicted in the creative artefact). Other portrayals may have been gleaned from various articulations in the media, much of which can seem to be pulled from a photographic database limited to one of three categories of Jews: the ultra-orthodox; men who wear *Kippahs*, and women who adorn themselves with Stars of David. Thus "pictures" of Jews in Germany tend to be confined to versions characterised by markers of religiosity or other symbolic forms of identification. Such characterisations exclude multiple alternatives that indicate far more diverse and widespread possibilities of being Jewish, in Germany as elsewhere and significantly, do not on the whole, encompass real life encounters. These may then be fused with collective themes about Jews that circulate in contemporary collective "thought spaces", which (as noted in Theme 4) tend to fix themselves around the triumvirate of the Holocaust, antiSemitism and Israel. The result fails to recognise the multifarious and in many cases idiosyncratic nature of being Jewish.

In the words of Alain Finkielkraut in *The Imaginary Jew:*

> They are 'those people' whom no label fits, whether assigned by the Gaze, the Concept or the State. There is, to be sure a Jewish type, but the rule has

> too many exceptions to be a reliable guide. Or rather for Jewishness the type is the exception and its absence is the rule: in fact, you can rarely pick out a Jew at first glance. It's an insubstantial difference that resists definition as much as it frustrates the eye: are they a people, a religion? a nation? All these categories apply, but none is adequate in itself. (Finkielkraut 1980)

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The study of Jewish identity was until recently a small field which focused on the immediate post-war period. It is dominated by transnational American Jewish scholars, particularly drawn to Sociology and the social sciences who move between Europe and USA and Canada that testifies to the main destination of the Jewish diaspora who fled the Nazis from the 1930s and settled there. Almost all had parents or grandparents who were in the Holocaust and murdered or escaped, meaning that this history and its entanglement with memory weaves its way through the generations. Lynn Rapaport's *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust: Memory, Identity and Jewish-German Relations* (Rapaport 1997), for example, was published in 1997 and focused on the sociological impact of the Holocaust. Since 2016 Susanne Cohen-Weisz published *Jewish Life in Austria and Germany since 1945: Identity and Communal Reconstruction* (Cohen-Weisz 2016) based on 80 interviews with communal and organisation leaders – a study of communal reconstruction and its outcome comparing Germany and Austria. She charted changes in Jewish group identity across generations and in response to public events as part of her doctoral thesis at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

As noted, more than half a decade after Peck's and Bodemann's widely praised works, Mounk offered a comprehensive overview of post-war Germany in which he intersperses components that not only bring these histories further up to date, but interweave autobiographical elements in the form of his own recent family history, together with a succession of wry anecdotes relating to his experience of having essentially had a Jewish identity ascribed to him by gentiles in Germany. This imposed condition may have reflected his birthright, but not his inculcation in a kind of fragmentary Jewishness. The disparity between these two poles of faint Jewish identity and being "identified" by others as patently Jewish is key to the tenor of Mounk's work. Via narration of formative experiences such as being forced to self-identify in a faith group for the purposes of compulsory high school religious instruction, or of an atmosphere in which he had "no

doubt" his classmates would have said of him: "He's no German. He's a Jew" (Mounk 2012, p.70), he examines the notion of what encountering a contemporary Jew might mean to a German, and how this may be reflected back onto the Jews themselves, impinging on aspects of their own self-understanding. As such his emphasis tends to rest on what others make of his being a Jew, which he plausibly suggests is primarily a mirror to their own preoccupations. His work derides such imposed assignations as to his identity as awkward and derivative. Although he ends up taking on the mantle of Jewishness as "an act of courage" (ibid, p72) he ultimately expresses his pleasure at having been able to dispense with both other- and even self-identification as a Jew when during the writing of this book, he moved to New York, where Jewish identity is so commonplace as to be essentially unremarkable, the antithesis to the context he left in Germany.

> In Germany, the older I got, I felt increasingly less German and increasingly more Jewish. Now, where I live in New York, a city with one and half million Jews, I don't identify myself any more as a Jew, but rather as a New Yorker (Mounk 2019).

In this sense the hybrid narrative combined with the autobiographical form of my work inverts Mounk's paradigm whereby my experience of living as a Jew in Germany further activated my pre-existing Jewish identity according to my own motivations. Due to the relative normalisation of Jewishness in the Australian context vis à vis in Germany, the ease I felt with such self-identification and the virtual absence of others ascribing to me particular narratives predicated on my being Jewish, together with the nature of my quasi-secularity meant that until I entered Germany, whether figuratively via my husband or literally via our migration there, my Jewishness had made relatively few demands of me, although it was deeply felt. My interviewees add to this other perspectives that are of particular note given the emphasis (explored in the Methodology section) on their selfdirected engagement with their individuated forms of Jewishness.

Germany produced an awakening of my Jewishness that was in no small way influenced by inherited trauma about the Holocaust and that is presaged in Marianne Hirsch's notion of familial and affiliative postmemory (Hirsch 2012, p.114). While it's possible I may have moved to elsewhere in Europe, it is worth noting that if I had not fallen in love with a German man, I would have been very unlikely to have implanted myself in Germany as a member of Diana Pinto's "Third Pillar", whereby Jews from the "new world" actively

migrate to contribute to the revivification of the cultural-intellectual wealth of pre-war Jewish life. Yet while I may not subscribe to any collective imperative to live as a Jew there *per se*, I was persuaded by another personally derived imperative. If I were to live in Germany, then I would do so as a Jew actively engaged with my Jewish identity, according to terms I would decide, the essence of which is captured by Pinto's term "voluntarily Jewish" (Pinto 1998). As Yosef Haim Brenner, the icon of modern Hebrew literature whose complex relationship with his Jewishness infuses his work, captures it:

> There are no beliefs we Jews regard as obligatory … We are Jews in our lives, in our hearts and feelings. We need no rational definitions, no absolute truths, and no written obligations." (Brenner 1910)

In terms of the timing of my investigation, it is significant that my research window commences in mid-2012, as it picks up at precisely the point where Mounk left off. The circumcision debate that initiates my research period and trajectory and acts as the first and most critical in the series of "pivot points" as explicated in the forthcoming section, occurred shortly after Mounk completed his manuscript. This is critical not only in terms of tracing a timeline from Bodemann and Peck to Mounk and on to my own contribution, but in the sense that while this thesis further explores themes raised by these three key authors, it does so in a correlated but markedly altered geopolitical and sociopolitical landscape than that which shaped their contributions.

> "While the memory of the murder of the European Jews persists, it is yet to be determined how it will affect the future of Jewish life in Germany that will increasingly have to contend with alternative claims on the German past."
>
> (Peck 2006, p22.)

Theme 3: Memory and Musealisation

The Jews are like photographs displayed in a shop window
All of them together in different heights, living and dead, Grooms
and brides and Bar Mitzvah boys with babies.
And there are pictures restored from old yellowing photographs.
And sometimes people come and break the window
And burn the pictures. And then they begin
To photograph anew and develop anew

And display them again aching and smiling
(Yehuda Amichai 1991)

Public acts of atonement for the Holocaust in Germany are fixed in musealised memory cultures that can be readily grasped in the numerous memorials and monuments as well as Jewish museums that are concentrated in Berlin but are extant throughout the country. These sites of memory are collective spaces that, despite their purported intent, arguably refer to notions of Germanness more than they do to Jewishness. For visitors to Germany, whether Jewish or gentile, and perhaps for Germans themselves, they can be read as testifying to a highly orchestrated and persuasively laudable commitment to political or externalised forms of reconciliation. For Jews living in Germany these fixtures of the public imagination may be recognised as such, yet due to a more nuanced intimacy with the complex socio-political machinations that affirm them, they can be open to other interpretations. One such prevailing perception is that these places of concrete, glass, timber and stone act as forms of quarantining of repentance that tend to "fence off" such narratives from the separate concerns of the broader population. A key question here is whether these collective responses also serve the function of alleviating individual Germans from making analogous reckonings within their own families (Kansteiner 2010), a condition which strongly characterises the landscape in which Jews also live, where distinctions between collective and personalised atonement for, or engagements with, the Holocaust can be disjointed. This only adds to the contradictory set of articulations regarding this shared but disparate and/or contested past, the after-effects of which Jews in Germany are left to internalise and attempt to disentangle.

Such musealised renderings, by virtue of the mandates of externalised reconciliation, tend also to perpetuate narratives about Jews that rely on the Holocaust, and thereby on the framework and explication of Nazi ideologies for their orientation. When these institutionalised narratives are more discernible than Jewish life itself, they can chillingly evoke Hitler's proposed "Museum To An Extinct Race" and suggest a level of expedience that may exist with regard to keeping Jews in Germany "locked up" in museums and imaginations rather than as active players in their own destinies, with consequences that do not tend to improve understanding between Germans and Jews.

> Whether representations of the Holocaust today replicate the Nazis' own intentions for the presentation of Jews is a powerful benchmark for any

> musealisation of the Holocaust ... Bluntly put: is anti-Semitism an inevitable by-product of a ... linear narrative of the Holocaust? (Holtschneider, 2011)

As has been recurrently noted, such renderings embed Jews in memory spaces in which they are "dead"; relics of former times trapped in their vitrines (Pinto 1999). As such even when in recent years living Jews have begun to be represented in museum exhibits dedicated to the assertion or explication of "resurgent Jewish 'life', with limited other tangible frames of reference such depictions can tend to deaden or distance their subjects. The notion that these museums and memorials are created *about* rather than *for* Jews is compounded by the fact that many continue to be run by non-Jews, raising questions about the extent to which Jews can articulate their own narratives in Germany, (Holtschneider 2011, ibid.) and suggesting alternative emerging possibilities. The answer to Diana Pinto's open question from two decades ago: "How should Jews approach and intervene in Europe's growing Jewish Spaces, increasingly initiated, populated and even administered by non-Jews?" (Pinto 1999, *The Third Pillar*, p.11) may only now find its answer. The sudden resignation of the non-Jewish director of the Jewish Museum, Berlin in June 2019 after a series of controversial exhibitions and events culminating in the museum's publicity department posting a link to a "must read" article in support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel (Joffe 2019) most recently raised the prospect that Jews may challenge existing forms of such musealisations and attempt to claim aspects of their memory cultures from the hands of others (although this is by no means a guarantee of curatorial decisions in line with prevailing or official attitudes.)

As fresh developments occur in the public sphere, explored below in the "Pivot Points" section, individual Jews seek answers to open questions about the viability of their lives in Germany vis à vis the postmemory (Hirsch 2012) that tends to pervade them. As well as being themselves intertwined, these events are also "entangled" in memory, whereby numerous themes coalesce or occur in concert with one another so that they can be difficult to separate thematically.

The prevailing question of the imperative to define who or what a Jew may be and in particular in which "forms" they might choose to exist in Germany is key to the self-understanding of each Jew when s/he lives in Germany. By this I mean not only whether, as I have already discussed, to make oneself visible or invisible as a Jew, but equally to

the philosophical conundrum as to what extent one chooses to live as a relic of sorts to memory, beholden in various ways to the past as opposed to as an agent working with the threads of the past through the present towards a new “fabric” of the future. These are the themes that linger, most often in whispers between and behind the movements and monuments in service of reconciliation, as Jews in Germany weigh in their private thoughts the contradictions between expressions of support and resentment and their individual impulses as to how to situate themselves in this contrary landscape.

Avishai Margalit’s *The Ethics of Memory* surveys the role memory plays in human lives, whether they be ethical considerations via what he calls, borrowing from Anthropology, “thick relations” with family and friends, or moral imperatives in his “thin relations” at a societal level (Margalit 2004). His separation of these interactions along ethical and moral lines pertains meaningfully to my own work in terms of how I describe the process of “internalised reconciliation” as an operation that takes “thin” elements into “thick” contexts, where these encounter a third “inner” ethical-psychological dimension. The lingering impression in my reading comes from Margalit’s reconstruction of the ongoing debate that took place between his parents when he was a child in British mandate Palestine. It characterises a question key to the ongoing nature of Jewish life in contemporary postHolocaust Germany.

> MOTHER: The Jews were irretrievably destroyed. What is left is just a pitiful remnant of the great Jewish people [which for her meant European Jewry]. The only honourable role for the Jews that remain is to form communities of memory – to serve as ‘soul candles’ like the candles that are ritually kindled in memory of the dead.
>
> FATHER: We, the remaining Jews, are people, not candles. It is a horrible prospect for anyone to live just for the sake of retaining the memory of the dead … Better to create a community that thinks predominantly about the future and reacts to the present, not a community that is governed from mass graves. (Margalit 2004, Preface, p VIII)

The notion that the musealisation of Jews in Germany is cordoned off within memory spaces is nowhere more poignantly expressed than in the form of the few still-living Holocaust survivors who reside in Germany. These nonagenarians have been made into

monuments in their own lifetimes. In their recurrent invitations into spaces of memory to perform remembrance or reconciliation rituals (Krondorfer 1995), as is captured via personalised acquaintance in the creative artefact, they are effectively referred to, utilised and indeed memorialised as living museum pieces. These are lives in which the Holocaust features as the defining characteristic. Lives that, for not much longer, continue in the country where the Holocaust was created and where it remains dominant. Yet outside of these spaces these survivors tend to be invisible; forgotten or assumed to be elsewhere or long since dead. Around them is nonetheless formed a communal obsession, propagated by Jews and Germans alike, with keeping them “alive”, for now literally as well as figuratively, to ward off the inevitable, looming death of the last of living memory that they carry. It could be argued that, partly in deference to these survivors as well as to the relative proximity of the past, “soul candles” have illuminated much of the way to the present. Perhaps this was a necessary process, but there is a generational shift now at play. The question of what happens to these embodiments of the Holocaust once they are gone is omnipresent in the contemplations of the Jews of subsequent generations who live in Germany, in the knowledge that it is they who will inherit the mantle of keeping such mediated memories “alive” even as they may wish to assert their own narratives.

As such my work captures a transition taking place between the imminent loss of this living memory and the emergence of new generations of Jews in Germany. A key exponent is Max Czollek and the associated “Radical Jewish Culture Days” festival, held in Berlin since 2016 at Maxim Gorki Theater’s experimental “R” offshoot to coincide with and subvert the official program of the “Jewish Culture Days” festival. Together with the authors of the magazine *Jalta - Positionen zur jüdischen Gegenwart* (Positions on the Jewish Present) magazine (Jalta, 2017), Czollek has begun in various modes of expression including theatre, poetry and journalism to give voice to a collective wish to live according to a set of fresh parameters that are informed by, but ultimately transcend, the framing of Jewishness around the triumvirate of the Holocaust, Israel and anti-Semitism. Such narratives are already disturbing inherited and entrenched notions of how Jews have been defined and perceived and, by extension, how they might be expected to do so. These renderings are now in the process, according to my thesis, of being internally negotiated around extant events that pertain to new and sometimes radical interpretations of the operations of collective history in the present. As Czollek writes in his polemic

“Disintegrate Yourselves”, invoking Bodemann’s “Memory Theatre” (Bodemann 1996) and making a deliberate stab at the bureaucratic jargon of “integration” that minority groups in Germany are expected to undertake - in terms of conforming to dominant cultural norms at the same time as providing proof as to the (limited) tolerance towards other forms of being:

> … the Carnival of Cultures takes place on a summer weekend … one goes to the Jewish Cultural Days and dreams of a lost world to the sad sound of the clarinet. Or you can listen to a fat Israeli pop singer squeezing himself out … the staging of culture and diversity for a German majority is different to the recognition of diversity. Instead, Germans want to wear a *Kippah* and show how anti-anti-Semitic they are. Most people probably don’t realise that the *Kippah* also strengthens religious Judaism. As if [orthodox Judaism] were the domiciled expression of Jewishness in this country. It is not. We have by no means arrived at where the Right have long since seen society. And because I wrote this book in order to make their vision of social and cultural homogeneity impossible, the title is louder: Disintegrate yourselves!
>
> (Czollek 2018 p. 120-21 translated from the German)

Such incendiarism from the 32-year-old Czollek fits with his self-appointed role as intellectual provocateur, yet it also illustrates how entrenched collective narratives of atonement and reconciliation are being torched by members of new generations.

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Jan Assmann compartmentalises memory into three spheres that are useful to the explication of this project. The first, which he calls “inner (neuro-mental)” (Assmann 2008, p.109) refers to the role played by “individual memory” in the identity-formation of individuals, which functions in a subjective temporal space. This is helpful in terms of characterising my attempts to access the inner worlds of the individual Jews I interviewed as a means to delve more deeply into the underlying and otherwise generally obscured realm of private thought, itself affected by public or collective expressions. These contemplations are framed by their relationships with what Assmann calls “social” or “communicative memory” (ibid.) which in the context of this project could be said to delineate the ways in which these individuated responses relate to the prevailing

narratives that exist among those closest to them as well as within their communities, regardless of whether these confirm or deviate from one another. Assmann's third incarnation, that of "cultural memory" (ibid.) could be said to extend to the public sphere where the manifestations of current events and commentaries take place, transmitted first into the space of "communicative memory" and then into the inner sphere of "individual memory" where the act of what I term "internalised reconciliation" occurs. Assmann articulates how these three zones of memory play into one another so that their separation is in a sense artificial, obscuring how the layers of memory are interwoven. He describes his schema thus:

> The distinction of different forms of memory looks like a structure but it works more as a dynamic, creating tension and transition between the various poles. There is also much overlapping. This holds true especially with respect to the relation between memory and identity. (Assmann 2008, p 113)
>
> Nina Fischer's more recent work on the transmission of Holocaust memory, more than Assmann's theory or Hirsch's work on postmemory, aims to extend the latter concept and its uses. Fischer refers to how memory "uncovers and interacts with the past's forms and meanings, both tangible and intangible, in and for lives, identities, and choices in the present". (Fischer 2015 p.2). Though her research focuses on Holocaust survivors and the so-called "second generation", she nonetheless emphasises the importance of amplifying the otherwise muted voices of these inherited memories. Memory, Fischer argues, "is not usually part of public commemorations"… but exists beyond individual "socially constructed roles." (ibid, p.9). Apropos my contention that the process of internalised reconciliation is ongoing and mutable, Fischer quotes sociologists Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering's "mnemonic imagination" which is "… defined as 'the ways in which we continuously qualify, adapt, refine and re-synthesise past experience, our own and that of others, into qualitatively new understandings of ourselves'." (ibid, p12)

My research explores the personally variegated ramifications of the shifts presaged by this debate, together with subsequent relevant events over the course of the research period, for the sense of wellbeing of individual Jews living in Germany today. The field of memory studies plays a guiding role in my research, in terms of what is transmitted and

communicated (Assmann 2008) remembered, revivified and lost, (Fischer 2015) together with memory as “a process” (Halbwachs 1992 in Fischer 2015, p1) The youngest of my interviewees, those from the third and fourth or so-called “new generations” of Jews born and/or living in Germany, attest to differentiations being made between what has come before and what is likely to be; as the workings of time alter the nature and uses of memory itself.

Theme 4: Anti-Semitism

Malice and stupidity
Like street dogs here run loose
Their breed can still be recognised
By their hatred of the Jews
(Heinrich Heine 1842)

The backdrop to the particularised incarnations and negotiations incumbent on Jews living in Germany described thus far is a tri-cornered figure that hangs, arguably nowhere more potently than in Germany, over Jews like a guillotine. The three points of the Holocaust, Israel and anti-Semitism form a triangulation that represents the primary paradigm with which Jews in Germany are forced to contend.

To take the Holocaust as the first point of this triangle, it must be emphasised that the effects of the increasing temporal distance from the *Shoah* does not inherently weaken the relationship, rather it could be said to intensify its power. This is especially poignant given the imminent loss of all living memory. It can be conspicuously apparent when current events reactivate direct memories of the Holocaust (in the case of the few remaining survivors) or animate inherited memories for subsequent generations, fusing these with key markers of the present in contested collective thought spaces, the dimensions and residues of which are left to Jews to individually and privately digest.

At the second corner, the identification by others of “all” Jews with Israel, itself now routinely subject to inverted analogising with Nazism, is inflamed in Germany because of this history. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is steadily imported into Germany whether by migration, globalised and local news sources or other factors that merge with pre-

existing anti-Israel sentiment dating back to the 68-er generation and beyond. As the novelist and columnist Maxim Biller writes:

> What was stated 30 years ago only on the left – that Israel was an aggressive, over-powerful, quasi-Fascist state equipped with yesterday's German ideology of blood and the soil – is today pseudo-liberal mainstream thinking … (Biller 2014, translated from the German)

As is further elucidated in the following chapter, these factors have been most recently exacerbated via the contextual enabling of the "saying the unsayable" in the atmosphere of exploitative fear that has occurred in the aftermath of the refugee arrival of 2015. These fuse with pre-existing expressions of Holocaust minimisation and anti-Israel sentiment that, as flagged by Mounk, Biller and others, have been present for decades, as in the analogy coined by the 68ers to which the journalist and commentator Henryk Broder refers here:

> You lighten your load by projecting the confrontation you never had, or never could have, with your parents onto your parents' victims. It works: The Jews are the Nazis, the Palestinians are victims of Jews, and your parents get off scot-free ... You can again look them in the face, because now you know where the Nazis who never existed in Germany are. (Broder 2004)

At key moments of Israeli-Palestinian conflict these elements have a tendency to ignite one or more strands of the third point of the triangle: anti-Semitism. In Germany this is no longer confined to "traditional" sources, even as these concurrently compound. NeoNazism continues to gain traction as it is felt to be legitimised with the recent resurgence of the political far right, fusing with this as well as in some instances (such as in the antiIsrael rally depicted in the documentary *Chosen and Excluded* 2017) converging with aspects of "imported" or Islamic anti-Semitism, which takes as the basis for its hatred both the state of Israel and conspiracy theories about Jews that circulate contiguously among right-wing anti-Semites. Meanwhile residual elements of both can also be found within the broader "ordinary" population. This holds true also for anti-Semitism emanating from the radical left, for whom the primary focus of enmity tends to be Israel.

> We can see what the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the central organ (with its huge circulation) of the narcissist German reactionary left, has been saying on this subject for years, publishing anti-Semitic caricatures of Israel as a knifewielding monster and Mark Zuckerberg as an all-powerful kraken, the unrhymed graffiti of Günter Grass in which that double-tongued veteran of the *Waffen-SS* accuses Israel of being a threat to world peace, guest columns by writers overtly or covertly sympathetic to Hamas, and above all dozens of comments in its own editorial opinion pieces, holding Israel to blame for everything. (Biller 2014, ibid.)

These three inter-connected elements of anti-Semitism, namely in far right, radical left and Islamic forms (together with prejudices about Jews that endure in elements of the general population in spite of prevailing narratives of “transformation”) form a second triangle that I contend hinges on one point of the first. This network of threats against Jews exists in a contemporary temporality that is best understood as past/present and captures the predominant elements, although it does not comprise the complete picture, of the complexity of challenges to the welfare and existence of “Jewish life in Germany” with which individual Jews must grapple. As is articulated in the creative artefact, the intensity of this triangulation also encounters more “benign” yet nonetheless powerful forces from within the broader population based around nebulous or pointed notions of “German values”. These may be expressed in interpretations of the constitution or the law, equally as they can emanate from pervasive political and journalistic commentaries or from the viewpoints of other individuals. At key moments these “judgements”, whether legally binding or societally cultivated, sharply interfere with the existential, ideological and emotional wellbeing of Jews in Germany, when they impinge on religious or cultural practices, as well as with the particular relationships individual Jews might have with each point of the aforementioned triangle/s and the aforementioned lack of, or limited acquaintances of most Germans with living Jews.

In 2018 the erstwhile comedian Oliver Polak took a break from his biting satire, which takes much of its impetus from Jews, the Holocaust and the usually unspoken resentments that may exist among Germans on these subjects, to offer a slim volume containing numerous autobiographical experiences, from early childhood onwards with anti-

Semitism and entitled, “Against Jew-hate”. Under the heading “Appeal”, he wrote: “I have decided to take the floor on the subject of anti-Semitism, because its topicality doesn’t make it possible anymore not to write about it. And because it has accompanied me for a very long time.” The first half of the book consists of pages at the top of which are printed short, open-ended questions, and occasionally answers. The reminder of these leaves are left blank, inviting readers to respond.

> Do you like Jews? Is there [such a thing as] “the” Jews? Do you know a Jew?
> What do you know about Jews? Are they facts, prejudices or overheard? … Who is Israeli?
> Not every Jew is Israeli. Israelis can also be Christians, Muslims or unicorns.
> But every Jew has the right to be an Israeli citizen because Israel was founded after the Second World War as a panic room for the remaining Jews. (Polak 2018 pp 9-19)

The tone of Polak’s language suggests a desire for directness presaging that such a volume might find a place on school curricula as antidotes to intensifying playground – and increasingly social media – instances of anti-Semitism where the word “Jew” is invoked as humiliation and swearword. The 2017 bullying of 16-year-old “Solomon” (Angelos 2019) is a case in point. After revealing to an until-then close friend that he was Jewish, Solomon was first informed by the friend that their friendship was over as he was Muslim, before having a realistic-looking fake gun pointed at his head and being suffocated under a black mask until he was unconscious by a group of classmates. This act was striking both for its grievousness as well as for its appropriation of instruments associated with the terrorist group IS.

The underlying currents as expressed by the “pivot points” I identify in the next chapter, and the reckonings they provoke, occur at the same time as Jews live in a landscape ostensibly in service to their plight, which nonetheless habitually addresses them in terms of this triangulation of the Holocaust, Israel and anti-Semitism. That means that Jews must assess the force of these events and what they may reveal about the nature of the broader society in which they occur, even at times when they are propagated or perpetrated by what might be designated by the majority population as “others”, a euphemism which in this context in Germany can be largely taken to mean Muslims, or to some extent, neo-Nazis.

Diametrical forms of othering can occur via popular elements of philo-Semitism, the festishisation of Jews, which can be encapsulated as running along a spectrum from relatively benign incarnations among those non-Jewish Germans who enthusiastically turn up to Jewish events, festivals, courses and synagogues, to those who in their compulsions about Jews establish forms of fetishisation that intrinsically mark out Jews as "different" and, as is illustrated in the creative artefact, rest on idealised stereotypes hinged on the inevitability of being fractured or overturned. Contrary to superficial interpretations, such complexes may be perceived as exploiting Jews or Jewishness in service to the individual needs related to German notions of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (ibid.) From these various sources arises an incongruous predicament for Jews in which such events, commentaries and fixations on or about them are liable to produce mutable and individuated but largely omnipresent senses of alienation and threat, even as the dominant landscape – and sometimes even these phenomena themselves – insist on embedded and prevailing narratives of reassurance, or of claiming democratic and "constructive" as opposed to inherently destructive criticism and expressions of hatred.

Conclusion to Themes

The outcome of these inter-connecting background themes is an environment in which Jews in Germany can feel systematically marginalised or excluded from the broader society, whether via their being championed or denunciated; whereby their religious freedoms and autonomy may be alternately disputed or asserted by others; where their vivid heterogeneity can be submerged in the service of the generalised purposes of others; in which notions of "belonging" are highly contested; and in which their continued presence in Germany can seem to be conditional; recurrently subject to the "approval" or "disapproval" of the "host".

This points to the contention that Jews in Germany today are on the whole precisely that; neither Jewish-Germans nor German-Jews, hyphenated identities to which few Jews in the aftermath of the Holocaust would anyway self-subscribe, and suggests an inherent paradox: how can Jews embody their burgeoning self-determination as members of German society and in communal landscapes, even while they might to varying degrees reject identification with these, and while the society itself habitually singles them out for this "special consideration", for better or worse? The pluralistic answers to this question

are addressed in the explication of my research, itself based on the question as to how such a web of exigencies can be located in a contemporary framework and be meaningfully unravelled.

My contention is that it is in the “heat” of current events that the radical embodiment of these phenomena occurs, and where they can be most powerfully understood. One avenue might be to analyse how the commentaries that form around such events reveal prevailing communal sentiments that might not otherwise be expressed outside of these “hot” occurrences. This indeed forms part of my analysis, principally as a pathway to the more pressing and largely hidden questions of how these events and narratives are individualised, internalised and, to one degree or another, reconciled by Jews in Germany.

The instructive examples that feature in the creative artefact and in the following section “pivot points” are taken from the research period between 2012 and 2019 that comprises the temporal scope of my project. Such externalised events demonstrate the fusing of multiple, unpredictable and at times contradictory challenges for Jews in Germany at the same time as they propel correlated events from the past into the present. This knotty process activates inherited trauma and necessitates a “coming to terms with” the reverberations of these events in the present that I contend takes place most compellingly in the internal process I refer to as “internalised reconciliation”.

Concept of "Internalised Reconciliation"

I demarcate this concept in relation to the political articulations that are typically referred to in Germany as *Versöhnung*, that is *externalised* reconciliation. It is in differentiation to this well-charted territory, in terms of moving from the political to the personal, that I wish to situate the concept of “internalised reconciliation” that acts as the nucleus for my research and extrapolates the emotionally – and psychologically – experienced elements of reconciliation that I contend are integral to humanistically meaningful articulations of reconciliation, even as they may be framed by this external socio-political landscape.

> Reconciliation in the sense we use the word today is understood entirely in a social and political perspective that is completely independent of personal feelings. ……(Levy & Schneider 2005 p.88)

As such I contend that the events in which Jews engage with Germans as individuals or communities are at these junctures revealed to be both part of, and separate to broader society and its concerns, and even more so relative to the private contemplations of Jews in Germany. It is nonetheless against the broader backdrop of Krondorfer's "reconciliation rituals" that I investigate the role reconciliation plays in deep and individualised manifestations that tend to remain otherwise hidden in the public arena of Jewish life in postHolocaust Germany.

> … '[R]ituals of reconciliation' can manifest themselves as deceptive, dishonest, and destructive public and private events. *Shoah* relations between Jews and Germans have been particularly susceptible to these negative aspects ... the discourse and ethos repeat patterns that distort and fictionalise the other, but they do not improve cross-cultural understanding.
>
> (Krondorfer 1995, p.16)

Interpersonal reconciliation, according to Krondorfer and explored in his book *Remembrance and Reconciliation, Encounters Between Young Jews and Germans* is predicated on the notion that material reconciliation occurs not in official representations that claim to act on behalf of individuals, but in active, personalised processes *between* them. In these terms reconciliation thus enters the small-scale world of human relationships, where it concerns nuanced interactions that do not follow prepared scripts but unfold subjectively, according to the philosophies and psychological perspectives of the particular participants in this renegotiation of the relationship between Jews and Germans:

> Reconciliation is not a monument but a process, not a museum ... not a theory, but an experimental practice. Monuments, museums and theories can be part of this process but can never comprise the whole ... Genuine reconciliation ... is a communal and experimental practice in which third-generation Jews and Germans remember the Holocaust, but also creatively engage in overcoming the limitations and deceptions of the currently cultivated discourse (ibid. p 16).

My focus takes the next conceptual step from Levy/Sznaider and Krondorfer to unearth the “personal feelings” suggested to be absent by the former and to delve deeper into the “process” of “overcoming the limitations and deceptions of the currently cultivated discourse” proposed by the latter. Where I differ from Krondorfer is in my suggestion that it is in the “afterlife” of both forms of (state-sponsored and interpersonal) reconciliation that new meaning can be excavated and exposed in ways beneficial to individual and collective understanding. That is to say, the reconciliations that occur in the private consciousnesses of individual Jews as they contend with developments that endanger or compromise their existence, and which powerfully influence the terms of their ongoing wherewithal and willingness to live as Jews in Germany.

3. EXPOSITION: PUBLIC EVENTS AS “PIVOT POINTS”

I use the term “pivot points” to convey the notion that key current events and their public analysis that occurred during the research period materialised profound changes in the collective discourse and atmosphere, at the same time as exposing and/or activating latent tendencies in Germany’s established socio-political fabric, with marked reverberations for Jews living there.

These shifts catalysed underlying anxieties for Jews in Germany that I argue may more generally reside in collective and individual spaces in more nebulous forms. At these key public moments such currents, at other times relatively subdued or held at bay, palpably entered private spheres where Jews in Germany found themselves compelled to reconcile their terms and after-effects within the conflicted lived realities of their presence in these altered contexts.

As noted, I refer to these recurrent, private philosophical-psychological processes as “internalised reconciliations”. At these key junctures, I contend, they found their apotheosis. As already indicated, I identified five “pivot points” as critical to collective and, expressly apposite to my research, to individual understandings of Jewish life in Germany. They occurred from the outset until the conclusion of the research window between 2012 and 2018 and are elucidated here:

1. 2012: Circumcision Debate

> "I'm sure circumcision will not be banned in Germany. Everybody I speak to says you can't do that here. But that's not the problem. The problem is the political discourse. Now suddenly you can speak of Jews in comments in the public debate as cruel people harming their kids. Not, 'Oh, the wonderful gift of Jewish people here'. Judaism is now something perceived as barbaric.
>
> "Until now it was considered morally bad to say something against Jews because of the Holocaust. Now you can say 'Well, I want to save children and you are doing things that are completely against 'our laws', so I have a moral justification to say the Jews are cruel, atavistic, anti-constitutional. I have the highest moral value'." (Interview, Alexander Hausgall, August 2012)

In May 2012 a regional court in Cologne made a ruling based on a legal interpretation of ritual circumcision whereby it was deemed to constitute "grievous bodily harm" and was therefore illegal. As is expounded on in the creative artefact, the case involved a four-year-old Muslim boy, a distraught mother who did not speak German and medical staff as well as police who erroneously inferred that the circumcision had been "forced". Although the ultimate legal ramifications remained questionable, in the interim between the ruling and legal resolution in December of that year the reverberations of such an edict – and more materially in the public debate that ensued in its aftermath – raised serious questions about the underlying currents pertaining to what might be termed German "*Gemuedlichkeit*" (comfort based on cultural imperatives) against its tolerance for the religious freedoms of its minority groups, in this case namely Muslims and Jews. This question was exacerbated by the tenor of the debate which was observed to be routinely predicated on "us" and "them" binaries, and from which both Jews and Muslims tended to be "othered", marginalised, and/or excluded (Wittich 2015). The notion materialised for Jews in Germany that their lives there, despite sustained protestations to the contrary, might be conditional on its adherence to "moral" determinations made by broader society. Given the obligation according to Jewish religious law to circumcise baby boys on the eighth day of life, a collective sense of urgency added to the atmosphere of acute anxiety. The question of whether ritual circumcision would continue to be allowed in Germany as such was a decision so fundamental to Jewish life that it would essentially determine whether practising Jews could continue to live there or not.

The so-called "*Beschneidungsdebatte"* (circumcision debate), which was significant enough to have earned this moniker, allowed me to witness at the very outset of my research how a single event and the commentary it produced in the media, political and other public spheres could radically shift the socio-political climate for Jews in Germany, with palpable and lasting effects. Its trajectory revealed the paradox between the relative powerlessness of Jews in themselves as members of a tiny minority group vis a vis the political protections, significantly predicated by the Holocaust, that would ultimately override public opinion – and even the German Association of Paediatricians – to safeguard the continued presence and freedom of religious expression for them in Germany. It was instructive to perceive how such an event contained the power to reveal underlying private tensions that have a tendency to be obscured beneath what I contend is a tendency towards political "ownership" of "Jewish concerns". The contrast between what could be read in the newspapers, heard on the news and consumed in television panel discussions, in which Jews rarely featured, with what I heard from Jews with whom I came in contact was notable.

Over the course of the research period, I repeatedly experienced the dimensions and implications of this binary mechanism. I convened with individual Jews in their private spheres to explore how they experienced such external events and debates. Although their testimonies differed greatly, there was a widespread sense that this *status quo* denotes a form of appropriation that, whether perceived as constituting threats or conditions to the freedom of Jews in Germany to express themselves and safeguard their autonomy as such – as in the case of the circumcision debate, or assurances that such discourses and actions were designed to protect them – as in its outcome, the overriding sensation was that of non-Jewish Germans discussing and determining, primarily amongst themselves, what the solutions to these "Jewish problems" might be.

As well as shaking the foundations of post-Holocaust Jewish life in Germany, the circumcision debate demonstrated how such events can fuse the contextual themes that I have identified and extrapolated in the introductory section – namely Home and Belonging, Identity, Memory and Musealisation and Anti-Semitism – creating a cocktail of misinformation, misunderstandings and differentiation.

In August and September 2012 I began my first round of interviews during a three-month field trip. As is illustrated in the creative artefact, the circumcision debate featured keenly in these interviewees, as was the case with further interviews framed around subsequent "pivot points". According to the ethnographic component of my research and its exposition (explored in the Methodology Section) I added my voice to the discrepant views of my interviewees. The key question in this first "pivot point" was revealed to be not whether ritual circumcision itself was "right" or "wrong", although such considerations featured along personalised lines of interpretation in our discussions, and the debate in Germany rekindled ongoing dissent in Israel and elsewhere, among Jews and non-Jews, about the ethics of circumcision. A considerable number of Israeli intellectuals as well as Jews and non-Jews elsewhere raise legitimate ethical questions about the practice of circumcision. The chief concern here, however, was whether it was right or wrong to allow Jews (and in this case also Muslims) in Germany to decide for themselves. Here, I found consensus. All of the Jews I spoke to could agree on one thing: it should be the Jews and not the non-Jewish German majority who decides.

2. 2014: Nazi slogans at Al Qud's Day Rally, Kurfurstendamm, Berlin

> **"**Every year on the Ku'damm there's a pro-Palestinian demonstration that is clearly anti-semitic. But if they cross the line of the law they are in trouble. They use their knowledge of the law to get around it. There are legal ways to show that you're anti-semitic. There is legal and political machinery that goes into all domains in Germany. The Germans are very good at it. But they don't think of the humanity."
>
> (Interview, Benyamin Reich, January 2016)

In July 2014, at the annual Al Quds Day Rally in Berlin a prominent section of the protest chanted slogans using Nazi terminology in what could be plausibly inferred as a conscious invoking of the Holocaust at a site key to its inception. As their smears intensified, the marchers moved along one of Berlin's key "Traumascapes" (Tumarkin, 2005) the Kurfürstendamm, a key location of *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) on November 910, 1938, when Jewish businesses and synagogues throughout Germany were demolished and torched, Jews were arrested, incarcerated in concentration camps

and collectively forced to pay a 1 billion Reichsmark “Atonement Tax” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2019). In widely broadcast video footage, the protesters could be witnessed chanting “Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas” and “Jew, Jew, cowardly pig, come out and fight’, the former a reference to the gas chambers of the Nazis’ extermination camps; the latter a taunt used by the Nazis (AnarchismusDoku 2014).

The Al Qud’s Rally was instigated in 1979 by the Islamic Republic of Iran, with a purpose “to express support for the Palestinians and oppose Zionism and Israel” (Sommerlad 2018). The spectre of the conflict in Israel – the post-Holocaust refuge for Jews – being projected transnationally into the place where the annihilation of Jews was invented and engineered, and specifically onto the site of a key turning point of the Holocaust, fused a constellation of elements with the capacity to amplify layers of trauma among Jews living in Germany. The creative artefact explores one variant of the repercussions via the firsthand experience of one of the interviewees, a jeweller who, from his shop on the Ku’Damm witnessed the march; a piece of post-memory (Hirsch, 2012) that he characterised as such: “This is the 1930s again.”

Given the prevailing tendency to separate them, and the events that would follow, the fusing of “imported” with “home grown” or “historic” captured by this event was both notable and prescient. The notion that such anti-Semitism could be quarantined as “imported” was an interpretation that could be superficially inferred by the physical appearance of many of the protestors involved, some of whom were wearing the black and white chequered *Keffiyehs* that are markers of solidarity with Palestinians, and the majority of whom were of what could be broadly termed “Middle-Eastern appearance”. In late 2014, I showed recorded footage of the chanting protestors during a presentation I gave at the German Studies Association of Australia’s annual conference, “The Self and the Other” at the University of Sydney. A German man in the audience, who later attempted to corroborate his credentials to me by asserting that he had “written two books on anti-Semitism”, stood up and interjected angrily: “But they’re not Germans!”. This assertion had much to say about tendentious perceptions and agendas at play regarding the identities of the perpetrators of anti-Semitism in Germany today.

Some observers pointed to the relatively small elements within these protests who participated in these rabid forms of anti-Semitism. However, when such incidents are experienced at close range, as in the case of the aforementioned interviewee, or indeed

replayed via video footage readily accessible on the internet and other media, the effects, as revealed in the creative component, can be shown to reverberate against individualised, pre-existing fears in powerful ways. There is also the suggestion that such a cohort may be, to some extent, representative of broader phenomena within and even beyond their ambit. Surveys from late 2014 showed a clear correlation between heightened Israeli-Palestinian conflict from July to September of that year and a significant spike in anti-Semitic attitudes among the general German populace (*Bundesministerium des Innen* 2017).

The occurrence of such an event and the widespread publication of the attitudes it expressed marked a key turning point in the trajectory of the research window, seeming to compound factors that had traumatised the circumcision debate of two years previously, with its felt implications of Jews as "barbarians", "guilty" or "other". According to my research, these factors tended to exacerbate various feelings of insecurity, conditionality and/or perceptions of threats among Jews living in Germany, the effects of which individual Jews are explored in the creative component.

3. 2015: Arrival of 1 million Syrian and other Refugees into Germany

> "In German, there's a word, *Ablasshandel*. Before Martin Luther came up with the new Protestantism, in the Catholic church there used to be this donation box where you could get your sins absolved if you paid something. It's a form of redemption.
>
> "I think critics on one side could say that Germans have this big sin on their shoulders and now, by helping the refugees, they try to get rid of it. There might be some truth in that, but I think there are a lot of people who are not thinking about the past, just about making a good example, and helping people."
>
> (Interview, Robert Schulzmann, January 2016)

The midpoint of the research period is 2015, a year that marked 70 years since the end of the Holocaust, a distance that inferred the dying out of the vast majority of surviving living memory from that era. Later that year, another key post-war historical event occurred when in September German Chancellor Angela Merkel allowed an estimated

one million unverified refugees, believed to have come predominantly from Syria, into Germany. Among other motivations, this could be read as the crowning gesture of decades of state-sponsored German atonement for the crimes of the Holocaust. Underscoring it was Merkel's *"Wir schaffen das"* (We'll manage it), a proclamation that, personified by her, testified to a well of German resourcefulness together with its diligently achieved "post-*Wiedergutmachung*" mantle of moral authority. Lingering awkwardly under this act, however, was the impression that Germany's leader was trying to reassure herself as much as the public at large, pointing to a vacuum of empiricism as to how this "managing" might be accomplished. The phrase entered the lexicon, later routinely deployed at Merkel's expense (Müller von Blumencron 2019).

Already embedded in these differentiated meanings were the foundations of what would shortly come to be a radically polarised landscape between those "for" and "against" Merkel's deed. In neither of these camps would it be it straightforward for Jews in Germany to find a clear home, regardless of their ideological or political leanings. As the creative artefact shows, for individual Jews this required an individually reckoned reconciliation between, in broad terms, humanitarian considerations and self-preservation. This disorientation was markedly exacerbated when three months later refugees (to what extent originating from this contingent remains opaque) were among those implicated in the mass physical and sexual attacks on women in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015/16. (Stenzel 2016). The imagery of Germany's apparent transformation captured in footage of refugees crammed onto the platforms of train stations travelling west towards life in Germany, rather than deportees herded east towards their deaths 70 years previously, carried reverberations with particular potency for Jews living in Germany. The events of Cologne and their aftermath activated underlying misgivings and fears among an increasingly wary German populace. It handed Merkel's detractors visceral exemplars on which to hang their cynicism or to whip up fear in a rapidly unfolding context in which Jews were left to orientate their particularised, history-inflected vantage points.

The complexity of the new landscape was articulated when the journalist Jakob Augstein (the illegitimate son of the writer Martin Walser, who in 1998 alleged that Auschwitz was being used as a "moral cudgel" against the Germans) (SWR2 1998), referred to the events of September 2015 as "*Wilkommenskultur*" (welcome-culture) a term he tainted with the suggestion that it characterised what he called an "instrumentalisation of history"

at an event I attended for the launch and panel discussion of the Jewish comedian and author Oliver Polak's book *Against Jew-Hate* (Polak 2018) on 7 October, 2018. (Augstein 2018). Despite his provenance and his reputation as something of a provocateur, Augstein, like his father, comes not from right-wing circles but from Germany's intellectual core. His comments exposed bipartisan lacerations that for decades had been forming around what the Hungarian writer Péter Esterházy referred to in his speech as recipient of the 2004 German Book Trade Peace Prize as Germany's position as "*Weltmeister der Vergangenheitsbewältigung"* (world champions at coming to terms with the past). (Ruderer 2009.)

With polarisations rapidly unfolding across, and even within the political spectrum, the gates to the "unsayable" seemed to have been cracked open, threatening to swing freely. The reverberations conveyed the capacity to profoundly undermine carefully hewn images of comprehensively transformed post-Holocaust and post-reunification Germany, as latent cultural restlessness collapsed into open contempt. The then-Federal President Joachim Gauck, who grew up in the former East Germany, declared that there were two
"Germanys", one a "light" nation and the other "dark" (Bundespraesident.de 2015). For Jews living in Germany, these developments – or indeed what some may have viewed as the exposure of the running sore that until now had been at least partially obscured – had a range of consequences.

In the aftermath, insistent questions formed as to the dimensions of homegrown threats to Jews that had been catalysed or exposed by Merkel's action. Alongside these was the fleshing out of the possibility that this cohort of refugees might have brought with them variants of "Arabic" or "Islamic" anti-Semitism. Although, as the creative artefact attests, this threat may have been felt to varying degrees among Jews in Germany, the generalised concern was that "many of these asylum seekers came from countries hostile to Israel and might strengthen anti-Semitic views among the [existing] Arab community"
(Garaev 2015). This statement was communicated directly to Chancellor Merkel by Josef Schuster, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany in early 2017. According to Schuster, his words produced an "awkward silence in the room after which the Chancellor took notes and promised, 'We must address that'." (ibid.) The subtext suggested the prospect that Germany's ruling elite may have been heretofore reluctant

to actively engage with the dimensions of this risk, or that they may not have identified it at all. If the risk was borne out, the implications would be damaging not only to Jews, but to Germany's reputation as committed to their protection.

4. 2017: German National Election – AfD elected to parliament

> **"**The fact that the *AfD* had strong voting feedback at the last elections makes me very angry. I always knew there was a lot of anti-Semitism in German society because I have experienced it and I have read studies about the political attitudes of this society, but still it makes a difference now to have the *AfD* in the *Bundestag*, in the democratic system. They have a lot of power being in this position; it gives them a lot of tools and money.
>
> "Then you have this development with the immigration of refugees from Muslim countries, which the Jewish community also felt threatened by. Terrorism connected to Islam is a worldwide trend these days and that is very problematic. The first threat goes towards Muslims today, not towards Jews, but it doesn't matter to me. I just see a society that is aggressive towards minorities within, and this is frightening me."
>
> (Interview, Flora Hirschfeld, October 2017)

By 2017 those who sought to dispense with the recent past altogether, while harkening back to a mythical pre-past, found conditions ripe for exploitation. The far right *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternative for Germany) political party was consolidated in the abscess. Its members set about disseminating keywords highly redolent of the Nazi era: "*Schuldkult"* ("guilt cult", implying an aversion to atonement for the Holocaust) and "*BioDeutsche*" (biologically German, with its associations of the spurious notion of "Aryanism") together with the attempted revival of the Nazi-inflected terms "*Lebensraum*" (literally "living space" but appropriated by Hitler as a euphemism for annexation), "*Heimat"* (a highly sensory notion of homeland) and "*Vaterland"* (Fatherland).

Established as a marginal Eurosceptic political party in 2013, in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee influx the AfD powerfully mobilised anxieties about "foreign threats" among sections of the populace, particularly in the guise of Islamophobia, while appealing to promises of a revived spirit of patriotism along the lines of "Imperialist Nostalgia"

(Rosaldo 1989) carrying strong associations with National Socialism. This strategy, in conjunction with the fruits of a swathe of so-called “protest votes” against the established parties, propelled the AfD to convincingly surpass the five per cent threshold for a place in the German *Bundestag* (federal parliament) and deliver Merkel’s CDU its worst result in decades. In the federal election of September 2017, two years after the refugee influx, the AfD secured 12.6 per cent of the national vote (Berning 2017), a disconcerting development for some, but as time would tell, not all Jews.

The following year its leader, Alexander Gauland, infamously referred to the Holocaust as “a speck of bird shit in 1000 years of glorious German history”, (*Deutsche Presse Agentur* 2018) a comment that was broadly condemned at the same time as it expressed much about what could now be uttered. His colleague Björn Höcke from the party’s extreme right-wing faction in 2017 chose the Hitler-contaminated venue of a beer hall, in this case in the city of Dresden in the former East Germany, the heartland of AfD voters, to propose a “180 degree turn on the politics of remembrance” (*Deutsche Presse Agentur* 2017). In the same speech he referred to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which occupies an entire city block in Berlin close to the German parliament and the Brandenburg Gate, as a “monument of shame”. (ibid.) A former history teacher, Höcke faced criticism for his declarations even from within elements of his own party (Kamann 2017) although an internal tribunal concluded that they were not grounds for expulsion. The shift expressed by these events, together with related contemporary rightwing consolidations in the neighbouring states of Austria, France, the Netherlands and Poland, as well as in Italy, Hungary and elsewhere converged in a *sui generis* predicament for Jews in Germany: old questions of the viability and security of Jewish life in Europe re-emerged. The combined effect was a sharply shifted atmosphere from previously in the research period, so that there now existed a more widespread and pointed incidence of, and tolerance for, words and actions that denounced, delegitimised the concerns of, or otherwise damaged Jews.

At the same time, counter-forces were at work. One such exemplar is that, since 2017 Höcke has been obliged to live next door to a scaled-down replica of the Memorial to The Murdered Jews of Europe, created by the guerrilla group The Centre for Political Beauty (CFP) after its members rented the property adjacent to his home in the town of Bornhagen in the eastern state of Thuringia and constructed the crowdfunded mini-monument in five days, within clear sight of his house. Despite, a slew of law suits, most

of which have so far been returned in favour of CFP, whose members continue to receive death threats, and the need for round-the-clock security, at the time of writing the monument was still standing. In more widespread terms, it is notable that the AfD's rallies have been consistently challenged by counter-demonstrations resisting racism and xenophobia, and that participants in these have tended to markedly outnumber AfD supporters, demonstrating that powerful forces, as seen in the anti-AfD demonstrations, stand up against racism and xenophobia.

As a footnote to the AfD's strength in German politics, in October 2018 a development took place that threatened to derail any attempt at certainty for individual Jews in the face of its spectre. The Central Council of Jews in Germany made its position clear. "The AfD is a party that provides a home for hatred for Jews as well as the relativising, or even denial of the Holocaust" (*Zentralrat der Juden* 2018). For once, the official line of the central council chimed with the views of numerous more liberal, left-leaning Jews, indeed seemingly with all Jews. An alliance of Germany's most prominent organisations issued a joint declaration characterising the AfD as a "danger to Jewish life in Germany" and made clear its collective awareness of, and resistance to the possible uses to the AfD of attracting Jews into its ranks. "Muslims are not the enemies of the Jews! The enemies of all democrats in this country are extremists, whether out of right-wing extremist, left-wing radical or radical Muslim sentiments. We do not allow ourselves to be instrumentalised by the AfD."

Still the council did not speak for all Jews living in Germany. In October 2018 a tiny but symbolically potent group, calling themselves "Jews for the AFD", was launched before being openly condemned in Germany as well as in vivid headlines abroad. Much attention was paid to the role such a group might play for the AfD, operating strategically for the party as an insurance policy against charges of anti-Semitism. There was less focus on the group's motivations. Its founder, Dimitri Schulz, who was born in the former Soviet Union, claimed that the AfD was "the only political party in Germany that declares 'Jew-hatred' as 'inseparable' from Islam, and says out loud that Islamic religious dogma is 'incompatible with the German constitution'." (Chazan 2018) Disagreeable as such contentions might be to the vast majority of Jews, the existence of this group suggests the force of underlying fears experienced by at least a handful of Jews in Germany and testifies to the muddled allegiances and increasing polarisation developing among Jews catalysed by this volatile landscape.

5. 2018: *Kippah* Attack, Appointment of "Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight Against Anti-Semitism" Commissioners

> **"**My grandparents made a big mistake by not interpreting the signs and leaving the country. Now it's more complicated to read the signs. I feel angry about the *AfD*, and the difficult thing is, some of them are teachers. It's so easy, always pointing the finger at someone else, it's always easier than pointing it at yourself.
>
> "It can be hard to believe that there are not as many people who are afraid as those who see the good in people. But I think people are motivated too, to protect our democracy and to teach the children. It's all about education.
>
> "I have only had good experiences with Muslims. The ones I know are open, hard-working and want to live a safe life. Of course, people will come here who aren't like that. But I think they're in the minority. I think the modern way of living is finding ways to have a peaceful life together."
>
> (Interview, Béatrice Loeb, November 2018)

In April 2018, a 90-second event ignited the kindling that had been collecting over the previous years of the research period, most notably since the "pivot point" of 2015. The incident and its aftermath brought together Israelis living in Germany, at least three Syrian refugees, anti-Semitism, Angela Merkel, "ordinary Germans", post-memory (Hirsch 2012) and the AfD. This fusion of elements seemed to substantiate the increasingly widespread idea that the gravest threat to Jews in Germany was Muslims from the Middle East. The fact that this notion was variously, and to differing degrees, accepted and rejected among Jews themselves, revealed itself as secondary to the purposes of others.

A pair of young Israelis were walking in the gentrified Berlin neighbourhood of Prenzlauerberg when they heard a group of three young men shouting anti-Semitic slurs in Arabic from the next corner. The Israelis were wearing *Kippahs*. One of the pair asked the Arabic-speaking men to stop. They responded angrily. One of the attackers

approached, repeatedly shouting "*Yehudi*" (Jew in Arabic) and brandishing his belt, with which he whipped one of the Israelis. Sensing danger, the victim began filming the attack on his phone, providing footage that would not only identify his attacker but create visceral imagery that would be broadcast transnationally, be played in the court case that followed and would profoundly amplify the incident's reverberations. Later it emerged that the Israelis were not Jews, but Arab Israelis from Haifa living in Berlin who had worn the *Kippahs* as an experiment. The assailant, who turned himself in the following day, was a 19-year-old Syrian refugee who had arrived in Germany in 2015. His identity seemed to confirm the threat that had been fomenting, as though a straight line could be drawn between Merkel's decision to permit the refugee influx and the inevitability of the attack.

The incident demonstrated the development of Merkel's toughening stance relative to her previous position in 2015, when, after the footage was released, one of her CDU lawmakers tabled legislation to ensure that "anyone who incites anti-Semitic hate and rejects Jewish life in Germany cannot stay in our country" (JTA, Jewish Telegraphic Agency 2018). The AfD weighed in, politicising the event for their own purposes. "With the influx of Muslims, anti-Semitism has again become admissible," declared Georg Pazderski (AfD, *Alternative Für Deutschland* 2018), the deputy chairman of the party infamous for its Holocaust minimisers, Gauland and Höcke, among others. Such mixed messages provided clues to the landscape that was emerging in the fallout from preceding events, putting Jews in Germany in an ever-tightening bind.

A solidarity march called "Berlin Wears *Kippahs*" attracted 2500 people, many of them not Jewish, and including at least one Syrian couple, also refugees (Gyulai Gaal & Blixer 2018), wearing *Kippahs* that had been handed out from the Jewish community centre on Fasanenstrasse, at the site of a former synagogue destroyed on *Kristallnacht* close to the Kurfürstendamm in west Berlin. The layers of meaning suggested the ways in which various narratives could overlap at the same time as they jostled with one another. Confounding the imagery of solidarity in this march and others were revelations that not all Jews were supportive of *Kippahs*, the markers of religious observance, being used as political props.

The Arab Israeli psychologist and author Ahmad Mansour weighed in further with a warning against misjudged liberal sympathies for extant anti-Semitism among Muslim migrants, yet another facet for Jews to add to their contemplations:

> … anti-Semitism has also existed among migrants for generations. With the addition of the many refugees in recent years who have been socialised antiSemitically in their home countries and are not aware of the special significance of these issues in Germany, anti-Semitic tendencies in Muslim communities are all the more pronounced.
>
> (Ahmad Mansour 2018 p. 246, translated from the German)

In November 2018 I visited the Jewish Museum Berlin to see "*Jerusalem*", an exhibition mired in controversy because of the ways it presented the ancient city from the contradictory perspectives of the three world religions who lay claim to it, seemingly marginalising or even questioning aspects of the legitimacy of Judaism in what is perceived by the vast majority of Jews to be its epicentre. Most pertinent was that the exhibition had been curated in a German state museum, run by a non-Jewish director, that was ostensibly established to illuminate the plight of the Jews in the aftermath of, and in the history that preceded, the Holocaust. On my way in, close to the entrance, I noticed a perspex display box on a pedestal. Inside it was a *Kippah* made of denim and embroidered in red thread with the face of a hipster wearing a beard and a fedora. The plaque read: "Adam Armoush, an Arab Israeli, was insulted in Arabic while he was wearing this Kippah." An information sheet, under the heading "The Kippah Catalyst" briefly described the event and posed the question, among two others: "How intolerant is Germany?" (Jewish Museum Berlin 2018).

It is plausible that the events that occurred in the lead-up to, and particularly in the fallout from the September 2015 refugee influx into Germany were the catalysts for Angela Merkel's appointment of 10 Commissioners for "Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight Against Anti-Semitism" (*Bundesministerium des Innen, für Bau und Heimat* 2018). Headed at the federal level by the career diplomat Felix Klein, who began his job on 1 May 2018, a week after the Prenzlauerberg *Kippah* attack, the appointments included state-level members in nine of Germany's 16 states. None of the federal or state-level commissioners was Jewish. Setting aside the diverse responses of individual Jews to the introduction of such officials, as a political gesture the nomination of these non-

Jewish “Jewish Life” commissioners underscored a tendency, not unfamiliar to Jews in Germany and referred to earlier in this exegesis, that could be termed “advocacy-by-proxy”.

The remaining seven states which declined to appoint anti-Semitism commissioners form a geographical arc that runs from Bremen, Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein in the north and continues east and south-east to the territory of the former GDR: MecklenburgVorpommern, Brandenburg (with the exception of the municipality of Berlin where Sigmount A. Königsberg holds the office of Anti-Semitism Commissioner for the Jewish Community of Berlin, the sole Jew to hold such an associated role) and Saxony-Anhalt.

This distribution reflects the relative paucity of Jews living in the territory of the former East Germany. “Contemporary anti-Zionism” and “anti-cosmopolitanism” led to the emigration of a third of the GDR’s small Jewish community” wrote Andrew Beattie in his book reviews on the subject of “East Germany's Handling of the Holocaust” in 2009. It may also point to the vestiges of the policies and education programs of the GDR which followed Soviet-sponsored narratives of the Holocaust that largely or wholly excluded its Jewish victims, (ibid.) with lasting effects.

> An extensive and deeply rooted right-wing subculture exists in the five new German federal states. These states comprise almost 20 percent of the German population but, also, almost 50 percent of the potentially violent right-wing extremists.” (Beattie 2009)

The geographical pattern of where anti-Semitism commissioners were not appointed comprises, with the exception of Hamburg, the strongholds of the AfD. As noted, one of these states is Saxony-Anhalt in which the city of Halle is located. On *Yom Kippur*, the Jewish Day of Atonement on 9 October, 2019 a gunman later identified as a follower of far-right ideology repeatedly fired at the entrance to that city’s orthodox synagogue. His attempts to slaughter the Jews at prayer inside were deflected by the heavily fortified door and a security system that meant the head of the Jewish community in Halle, Max Privorozki, could see and respond to the gunman’s movements via surveillance footage. The security system was not provided by any arm of the German government but by the Jewish Agency for Israel (Bennett 2019). Local police had refused Privorozki's request to protect the synagogue on the holiest and busiest day of the Jewish year. The police arrived eight minutes after emergency services were called, in which time the gunman

had murdered two passersby outside and left. The event, together with that of the arrest and rapid release of a knife-wielding man at the New Synagogue in central Berlin a few days earlier, appears in the creative artefact in the form of an epilogue. Both incidents provide a profound and chilling conclusion for the “pivot points” that preceded them, raising striking questions for what lies ahead.

The combined events and their aftermath punctuate the narrative of the creative component, acting as signposts for key developments that powerfully shaped and informed Jewish life in Germany during the research period, and whose reverberations continue to be felt. They demonstrate how, even as questions around the key themes I have identified of Home and Belonging, Memory and Musealisation, Anti-Semitism and Identity may seem to be etched into the institutions and stage-managed actions dedicated to their exposition, their experiential dimensions can be better understood elsewhere. Explications for these exist and are most meaningfully understood, I contend, in living narratives that take place well beyond such curated presentations. They occur in the collective sphere, where they are discussed in unrestrained public battlefields. As I explore in this project, their residue is most meaningfully digested by Jews in the privacy and safety of their homes.

The intensity of these current events and their associated debates contained the power to compel to Jews re-contend with much of what they had been led to believe was true in contemporary Germany. The resurgence of forces long since supposed to have been reckoned with or buried revealed – despite the painstaking expressions of public or externalised reconciliation – the likelihood that a sizeable section of German society had on the whole little or no connection to, or understanding of, real-life Jews and their concerns while still feeling qualified to attempt to dictate the trajectory and terms of their lives in Germany. Meanwhile the Jews themselves, under these conditions of crystallisation and duress, could readily find themselves not only misunderstood but marginalised and even voiceless.

Other lines of distancing could be drawn within the communities themselves, between official and unofficial, collective and individual interpretations. At key junctures the committees created to represent the communal interests of Jews in Germany issued unified pronouncements on their behalf, as they are charged to do. Other concurrent, individuated responses existed, but remained largely locked up behind closed doors.

This project is an attempt to open those doors; to prise out and materialise what I found inside. Jews in Germany, I learned, tended to retreat to their private spaces, where, together or alone, they reflected. This was where I found the reconciliations of interest to this project taking place; deep within individual consciousnesses as each of my subjects searched for ways to negotiate with themselves the terms upon which they could synthesise these developments into their personal ideologies, in order to remain, as embodied components of society, in Germany.

These reconciliations, as I have argued, were not of the type comprised by the public acts of atonement that could be glazed and concretised, trapped in vitrines or rhetoricised by politicians. They did not find expression in the performative (Bodemann, 1996) ritual acts that exist for the benefit of Germans or even, ostensibly, for Jews. Nor in the interpersonal reconciliations that involve attempts at mutual understanding between Germans and German Jews or Jews in Germany (these I differentiate according to individual preferences of self-identification). These approaches and factors, in foundational terms, were not unimportant. They may have been, to some degree, requisite for Jews to continue to live in Germany at all.

However, my research suggests that the most meaningful reconciliations occurred *within* individual Jews in Germany. The responses and processes I was privy to, in profoundly diverse iterations, revealed individual Jews in Germany to be repeatedly grappling with these socio-political shifts characterised by the five “pivot points” against an unfolding backdrop that could be characterised, to varying degrees, as insistently framing views resistant, misapprehended or antithetical to Jewish life in Germany. It was thus that I found the Jews with whom I spoke at great length and with tremendous trust, looking into themselves in the places they call “belonging” and “home” for the reconciliation they required in order to live in Germany, more or less peaceably, as Jews.

4. METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

Founded on my contention that the process of “internalised reconciliation” occurs in ways that are temporal and deeply private, the methodology for my creative work takes the hybrid form of a narrative enquiry based on interviews interwoven with

autoethnography, or what might be called a critical autobiographical practice, that is supported by this investigation.

The authors of a new book on *Research Methodologies for Auto/Biographical Practice*, Kate Douglas and Ashley Barnwell, drawing on insights from their respective disciplines of English and Sociology, note that we need to "talk better" about methodologies in the Humanities (Douglas & Barnwell 2019, p.1) particularly in interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary projects such as this one. This is also the case with research in Creative Practice with Donna Lee Brien and Quinn Eades' *Offshoots: Contemporary Life Writing Methodologies and Practice,* which approaches this area from creative perspectives and argues that when one writes about self and others "authorial authority grows out of the practice of writing, the precisely chosen language, the construction of the sentences …" (Brien & Eades 2018 p.15)

The creative artefact is constructed with much consideration to "language" and "sentences" and consists in significant part of extracts from a collection of 12 long-form narrative "depth" interviews that in my bifurcated roles as author and participant I conducted with individual Jews living in Germany during the research period from 2012 until 2018. These inclusions characterise various responses to the notable transitions that occurred over this time frame, whereby the generalised atmosphere for Jews in Germany arguably shifted from a period of "stabilisation" to one of "destabilisation". At the same time the interviews function as individuated testimonies designed to evince the heterogenous life of many Jews in contemporary Germany.

The testimonies of each of the interviewees are linked through time and metaphysical space by the series of current events or "pivot points" I have identified, which act as signposts for the historical "moment" or indeed "moments" I captured and investigated over these six years. The narrative amplifies the ways in which these "moments" interact with the societal and personal transformations I have documented, and are presented together with associated and separate reflections regarding private experiences that colour individual viewpoints and shape the texture of these particular lives.

I have called these "long form", "narrative" or "depth" interviews, terms used by journalists, but they could equally be understood as oral histories which, with its extensive attendant literature, emphasises their relationship to an act of remembering.

Moreover the traditional interview, while always dialogic, sometimes shifts from biographical to autobiographical in definition. As the oral historian Penny Summerfield notes, many practitioners in the field "now increasingly regard the methodology as an autobiographical practice centred on the subjectivity of the narrator". Summerfield's claim that this emphasis underlines the need to understand how subjectivity is constituted through the narrating of experience, as well as the dynamics of the relationship between narrator and interviewer, is meaningful for my work. (Penny Summerfield 'Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice' *Miranda*, No 12 2016, p2) Further to this, the historians Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli stress the interaction of group memory and ideology within collective accounts, "in particular," says Summerfield, "the ways in which personal and public accounts of the past feed off each other".

Nevertheless, the precise relationship between interviewing an assortment of individuals and the media-driven public debates in Germany is difficult to determine within the Humanities and Social Sciences. This is especially so when, as noted in the "Themes" section, much of the research into "collective memory" rarely explores individual memories but relies instead on public manifestations such as memorials or physical sites. This, as Wulf Kansteiner argues, "misrepresents the social dynamics of collective memory as an effect and extension of individual, autobiographical memory" (Kansteiner 2002, p170). Together with the prescient timing of the project, the aspect of my approach that refers to "individual, autobiographical memory" is critical to the contribution I offer to the field when, as I contend, a diversity of individuated viewpoints has a tendency to be obscured. I emphasise that these testimonies reflect the thought of the individuals who articulated them at the time. Given that interviewing is an exploratory and not a representative methodology, and bearing in mind Kansteiner's point, each of these interviewees represents no more or less than their own thoughts as expressed to me during and at the time of each of the interviews. My approach gives credibility to the substance of each of the individual testimonies which are, of their essence, personal and which should not be read as templates from which to extrapolate generalised realities. My intention is to illustrate and further indicate the pluralistic nature of Jewish life in Germany, as personified by other individuals.

The Interviewees

The 12 Jews living in Germany with whom I conducted these long-form narrative interviews come from diverse geographical, demographic and denominational backgrounds. I found each of them using the rudiments of journalistic practice: namely entering spaces, in this case both “Jewish” and secular, real and virtual. According to established journalistic practice I conducted a series of secondary or “background” interviews.

Although I did consider the ages, genders and backgrounds of the participants, my research design did not set out to capture certain demographic features. None is intended to be characteristic of a particular background, nationality, place of residence, ideology, religious orientation, age group, gender, self-, communally- or externally-ascribed identity, or any other feature that may be inferred to define or imply these points of view more broadly. At the same time it is true that according to the trajectory of my academic enquiry I encountered and interviewed Jews both young and old, religious and secular, female and male, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, born in Germany and having emigrated from various places abroad and from diverse socio-economic strata, political persuasions and psychological dimensions. These Jews are women and men drawn from four generations that according to well-established conventions can be usefully termed: the survivor, second, third and next generations. I re-emphasise that I present these and other externalised markers as being in themselves by no means indicative, nor, in the case of various levels of religiosity vis à vis secularity, as just one example, as being inherently static. According to my intention to delve substantially beyond the types of overgeneralised declarations that is readily grasped in both traditional and social media and other forms of public discourse, I strategically avoided ethnographic “sampling”. I wanted to underline that the use of the word “community” frequently refers to a communal group which obscures the particular felt realities of a myriad of individuals:

> Our backgrounds are collages made of scraps of our lives; snapshots, sounds, memories, lyrics, pictures. They are colourful and ... often only for us to understand ourselves. There is … not one collage that would apply to several people, even if they have emigrated from the same country.”
>
> (Gorelik, 2012, p. 36 translated from the German)

In the course of my research it became apparent that when Jews in Germany are referred to, whether by Jews or gentiles, there is a strong tendency for them to be ascribed to one of four groups based on their provenance, those being: German-born, Israeli-born, “Russian” born, and born elsewhere. These groupings are prone to being used as shorthand to infer certain belief systems that rely on crude stereotypes. Some common such unreliable reductions are:

1. German-born Jews are typecast as members of a conservative but relatively assimilated “closed shop” who are dying out, resentful of the influx of “Russian” Jews who have “taken over” their communities and status; and who are more than anything united by the Holocaust, which acts as the most palpable frame to their presence in Germany and the interests they wish to uphold
2. Israelis are typically presented as young creatives in Berlin who don’t care much about the past and are on the whole more “relaxed” than other Jews here; whose primary interests are cheap rent and cool experiences rather than engaging with Jewishness or communities; and who, when they stay, typically do so because they marry non-Jewish Germans, but otherwise are generally expected, when they “grow up”, to return to Israel
3. Of so-called “Russian” Jews (as noted this itself is a misnomer given their provenance spread among numerous former Soviet states) it is routinely insinuated that these communities by virtue of language or cultural practices are effectively “impenetrable” to other Jews, even while many are considered to be not “real” Jews according to Jewish matrilineal laws of descent. The inference is that they are economic migrants who don’t know or much care about Judaism and for whom, given these assumed motivations as well as the paucity of education they received in the former

   Soviet Union about the Holocaust, this history plays little or no role
4. Jews from elsewhere are less often able to be categorised in such reductive ways, other than finding themselves answerable to the accusation, perhaps most pointedly from other Jews: “Why would you come here?”

Such categorisations actively obscure the vivid heterogeneity of Jews in Germany, as elsewhere which, although they may be in some ways shaped by their backgrounds, cannot be reduced to these simple reductive equivalents. When the interviewees give voice to the biographical, ideological and other conditions that have shaped them in one

way or another and which may to some degree inform their commentaries, they and we remain aware they are speaking for themselves. Their responses express views that are highly variable, often divergent, even contradictory and attest to the diversity of sentiment that exists, even when such contemplations are being drawn in response to issues that might be considered “communal”, namely the externalised threats to and conditions of “Jewish life in Germany”.

This helps to substantiate the notion that Jewish life in Germany by its very nature is irreducible to consensus generalisations, even among particular “groups” of Jews, if such phenomena can plausibly be said to exist. A welcome outcome of this methodology is its contribution to the dispelling of invented collective notions characterised by such insidious terms as, for example, “a Jewish perspective” and other spurious tropes. The individuated responses taken from within this so-called “special status” minority community in Germany in that sense speak against a tendency to conflate them with the whole, or identified sub-sets of the whole. This is significant in an environment in which Jews comprise such a small fraction of the broader population and are thereby routinely liable to be subject to minority generalisations. As the novelist Amos Oz said, “I portray individuals, I don’t portray society” (Oz 2013).

In terms of the selection of suitable interviewees, the commonality, if one can be identified, is that each could be said to be aware of, and actively engaging with, the particular and personalised demands entailed by living in Germany as a Jew. From the outset of my initial, broad-ranging discussions it became apparent that this was the frame through which the most robust and complex responses could be derived. These are Jews who, despite their highly diverse perspectives, live in Germany as active members of the broader society with a common wish to engage with that society as they negotiate their places within it. This engagement exists in concert with personalised “workings through” of their presence in Germany which I contend take place in their ongoing private reflections (“internalised reconciliations”).

While, to one degree or another arguably any Jew in Germany could be said to undergo some form of this process according to these conditions, for the purposes of my research my interest is focused on those who actively rather than passively engaged with the complexities of life there as such, and whose awareness of these inner manifestations was already “activated”. This selection premise engendered a focus on those whose

“cultural” orientation as Jews tends to be strong. These are those who inhabit their Jewish identity with reference to highly divergent weightings and conditions relative to religious, cultural and familial inclinations. Such hybrid identities are widespread among Jews in Germany as elsewhere, but I found them to be conspicuously and routinely misunderstood in this context. As explored in the “Themes” section, what I term “Jewishness” is habitually conflated with the narrower terms typically ascribed to the religion of Judaism, as opposed to interrelated cultural identities. The creative component elucidates how these limitations of understanding sharply colour the conditions of being Jewish in Germany. As such I sought to address this gap in knowledge by capturing the observations of individuals who are, and who feel Jewish, yet not necessarily according to recognisable markers or assumptions, and not often in ways that might be readily gauged on sight.

The creative artefact further illustrates how assimilated, non-religious or quasi-religious Jews are often able to choose whether or not to disclose their Jewishness. This means that individual Jews can opt for “invisibility” in an environment in which disclosure can be uncomfortable or dangerous, yet which can also play a role in contributing to “collective invisibility”, indicating one aspect of the circularity of this problem. Among my interviewees are those who are open about their Jewishness and others who keep it “under the radar” from all but trusted friends and confidantes. Other interviewees are “known” publicly as Jews. This heterogeneity among my interviewees allows for various possibilities to be encountered.

Autoethnography / Critical Autobiography

The aptness of the discipline of autoethnography as the modus operandi was compellingly underscored when I moved to Germany in 2016 and became part of the phenomenon I was studying, whereby my position moved from qualified observer to participant. As such the interview-based components of the narrative artefact are interwoven with significant elements of authorial disclosure, which also cleave to the aforementioned “pivot points”. These autobiographical elements provide a means via which I break down my position of omniscience as author and locate myself within the narrative arc, operating as guide, commentator and confessor. This mechanism draws me as an active participant into the territory and demands a level of forthrightness and

self-analysis commensurate with that of my interviewees, while conferring a level of reliability. As the essayist Phillip Lopate argues:

> What stands in the way of most personal essayists is not technique, but the emotional preparedness to be honest and expose one's inner nature.
>
> (Lopate, 2007 p79)

Autoethnography is now a well-developed reflexive methodology in the Humanities and Social Sciences. As characterised by Ellis, Adams and Bochner, it is:

> [A]n approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially just and socially conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011)

As outlined in the "Background" section, my intimate connection to the project is grounded in elements critical to my identity and to the conditions of my life. As such in terms of the authenticity of engagement, one might say that the material demanded my participation in it. This research project enabled me to explore the identity-reflecting nature of living as a Jew in Germany, via my interviewees *and* my own experience and framed by the "pivot points". In autoethnographic terms, this method forms a nexus between the autobiographical, the personal, and the cultural, social and political; the substance of the research inquiry.

The depth and differentiation of the presentation of narrators, itself hinged on my being among them, is central to my interpretation and use of the genre of autoethnography. As Ellis et al claim: "The author incorporates the 'I' into the research, yet analyses self as if studying an 'other'" (Ellis 2004, Goddall 2008). Influenced by recent trends in the Humanities relating to emotions and the senses, ethnographers have begun to further distinguish themselves from one another by separating "evocative" from "analytic" ethnography. As such, analytic autoethnographers focus on "developing theoretical

explanations of broader social phenomena", whereas "evocative autoethnographers" focus on narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses (Hunt & Ruiz Junco 2016).

According to these definitions, my research could be said to exist in the space that joins these strands of autoethnography. The concept of "internalised reconciliation" that I have developed could be identified as a form of analytic autoethnography in that it expresses an endeavour to situate the research in a theoretical space. It acts as a frame for and "explanation" of this process, that directly relates to "broader social phenomena"; namely the engagement of interview participants (and by inference other Jews living in Germany) with relevant events in the public sphere, the effects of which are "unpacked" or "disentangled" in the private sphere as a condition requisite to "engaged" life as a Jew in Germany. In terms of evocative autoethnography, the presentation of my interviews and selfinterviews characterise an attempt to vividly re-imagine the emotional landscape in which these negotiations take place, and indeed which inform them. The presentation of a range of individuals as they embody and express the dimensions of the research question are intended to be suggestive and resonant, that is to "open up conversations" and to "evoke emotional responses". "In these texts, the workings of the self are expressed emotionally, physically and cognitively." (Ellingson & Ellis 2010 p. 448)

The autoethnographic elements of the creative artefact reveal without censure the nature of my subjectivity in the absence of any assumption that this inherently "weakens" the findings of the project. On the contrary it offers a compelling representation of how we as human beings synthesise "rational" and "emotional" responses into the narratives we shape around and articulate for ourselves (ibid, p.452). This can be readily perceived in the creative artefact via how such "contradictory" impulses variously interact with the "factual" developments that unfolded in Germany during the research period (themselves highly susceptible to subjective interpretations), and including not only the key "pivot points" but other events I attended in the scope of cultural festivals, film screenings, religious services, rallies and so on, together with more prosaic aspects of daily life, including "private world" interactions in more quotidian settings. The ways in which these narratives interplay and compete with one another testify to the nature of the currents I explore in this project, in which external events and inner responses are entangled and are ultimately understood via lenses which in turn shape the ways in which these "twin histories" unfold and are grasped.

Structure of the Creative Work

The narrative structure of the creative artefact reiterates the emotive terms of the latter, arranging these autoethnographic elements into the established form of a novel, whose form and substance is intended to enfold the reader into the emotional continuum. As such the narrative takes the form of a traditional plotted story arc consisting of an introductory event intended to capture the reader's interest, which continues to develop via evolving events, together with the responses of the interviewees, and the implications for my life as narrator and participant. These are presented in a series of interrelated vignettes that move back and forth in time.

My interactions with my interviewees and with the externalised and private events that affected their lives and mine during the research period are explored in ways that offer the reader expanding illuminations about how these forces can work within private experiences and against societal forces. These glimpses are by their nature intimate. They compound as the story unfurls, leading to a climax, dénouement and resolution of sorts. Together with the contributions of my interviewees, some of whose perspectives can be seen to fluctuate over time, the unfolding of the story traces my own evolution and touches my family. These inclusions are integral to illustrate the complexity of locating various iterations of Jewishness within ourselves and in Germany, and as individuals finding our places in the world. The historian Paula Hamilton notes:

> "It is in oral histories where the collapse of the past/present relationship is most marked because some degree of distance is always present in memory writing. Being confronted with the embodied memory and its individual particularity in relation to an event has profound consequences."
>
> (Hamilton 2005, p 14)

The concept of internalised reconciliation presented here in theoretical form can be understood in practice in the trajectory of the creative artefact, informed by these key events and their after-effects, which I argue contribute to the activation of this process, playing focal roles between and "behind" the narrative presentation of the testimonies of my interviewees, including my own. They act as the frame through which I attempt via

narrative explication to meaningfully address the twin research questions identified at the outset of this exegesis, of how Jews live in Germany and how Germany lives in the Jews.

The depiction of these current events and others, as experienced directly or indirectly via my interviewees and myself, act as key temporal markers in the narrative. They highlight critical junctures in the socio-political sphere, around which and in whose *sillage* I contend the orientation of Jewish life in Germany has a tendency to take place. My observation is that when Jewish people are collectively differentiated in the public arena, whether in positive or negative applications, ideas of identity and place in Germany assert themselves through both official and unofficial channels, and as such it is in these moments that self-actualisation is likely to be materialised.

Geographical and Temporal Frames

This research is focused on and centred in the German cities of Munich and Berlin. My decision as such is trifold: (i), In terms of community membership these cities comprise the largest populations of Jews (IKG 2019), (JG-Berlin 2019) who, together with other Jews outside of these official statistics, live in arguably the most active centres of Jewish life in Germany today;

(ii) The contrast between the two locations as, on one hand, the birthplace of Nazism, and on the other, its adopted capital city, expresses palpable post-historical aftermaths that can be readily grasped in the innumerable places of memory clearly marked as such in Berlin vis à vis Munich's relatively "hidden" approach to its shared Third Reich history. As Amos Elon wrote of Munich half a century ago, and Lion Feuchtwanger nearly four decades beforehand:

> Here, Hitler began his career. In smoke-filled, sour-smelling, heroically vaulted beer cellars, which even today resound to German march music, Hitler gave his first speeches. He is said to have loved Munich, in contrast to Berlin, where he never felt at home. (Elon 1967 p 30)

> Everything that was rotten and bad in the *Reich* fled, as if by magic, to Munich. (Feuchtwanger 1930)

In his book *Munich and Memory* the historian Gavriel Rosenfeld argues that the "normalisation" of Nazi buildings in Munich, many of which were stripped of their

swastikas and reused, characterised a “prevailing desire … to forget the war and, more specifically, the city’s responsibility for nurturing the political movement that produced [it]” (Rosenfeld 2000).

The art installation, “Places of Remembrance” in south-west Berlin’s “Bavarian Quarter” (whose name might be seen as somewhat ironic in light of this distinction) is one cogent illustration of this differentiation. Created in 1993 by the artists Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, the artwork consists of 80 placards attached to telegraph poles around the neighbourhood that, on one side, depict a simplified graphic of ordinary items such as a thermometer or a lever-arch folder, and on the back of which are reprinted the Nazi laws pertaining to them; in the aforementioned cases: “Jewish doctors may no longer practice. July 25, 1938”, and “All files dealing with anti-Semitic activities are to be destroyed. February 16, 1945” (Stih & Schnock 1993).

(iii) A further disparity explored in this project could be said to exist in atmospheric differences between the post-reunification cosmopolitan hub of Berlin in which Jewish life is arguably significantly more visible via Jewish cultural festivals, numerous synagogues, Israeli eateries and various other manifestations, as opposed to the politically and socially conservative capital of Bavaria, where these are notably more limited and subdued, and where in 2018 the state premier, Markus Söder, passed legislation requiring crucifixes to be displayed at the entrances to public buildings.

Complicating these depictions that characterise Berlin as more authentically and openly engaging with the conditions of its past and present than Munich is the higher incidence of reported physical and verbal attacks on Jews there.

> More often than before, anti-Semitism took on brutal forms in Berlin last year. This is the conclusion of the 2018 report on anti-Semitic incidents presented by the Berlin Anti-Semitism Research and Information Centre (RIAS Berlin) on 17 April, 2019. The clear increase in the number of types of incidents that pose a particular risk to those affected is worrying … In 2018, RIAS Berlin recorded a total of 1,083 anti-Semitic incidents in the capital, 14% more than in the previous year (951). (RIAS 2018)

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My decision to structure the research around the occurrence, interpretation and trajectory of the “pivot points” was consolidated on the basis of empirical manifestations to which I was privy from the outset of my research. As already noted, the timing of my first research trip to Germany, commencing in August 2012, was significant in this regard. The testimonies of the various Jews in Germany with whom I spoke at the time of that year’s circumcision debate attested to the notion that these externalised discourses, engendered by a single event, had penetrated the membrane of their interior worlds to the extent that questions of religious freedom, security, tolerance and the widely acknowledged state-endorsed commitment to the existence of Jewish life in Germany were opened like wounds. These required internal mending in order for Jews living in Germany to reconcile the implications with the fact of living in *this* Germany, that is, the Germany in which this debate was now taking place in marked opposition to well-established narratives as to the importance of both the existence and the security of Jewish life in Germany and that continued to be felt after the situation was resolved.

According to the vagaries of this history-in-the-making, my research period marked a series of seminal shifts in the socio-political landscape that have had profound and lasting implications for Jews living in Germany. Just a few months earlier, there had been a prevailing sense that this was a country in the nervous throes of recovering its fractured identity, a process that is typically said to have begun in 2006, at the beginning of the previous six-year cycle, when Germany celebrated winning the football World Cup. With this newfound collective confidence, despite any reservations some Jews may have felt about German flags being waved on the streets, even as other Jews may have joined in, something of a consensus could be said to have formed, whereby Jews in Germany were encouraged to feel relatively settled and more visible in Germany, arguably more so than at any time in the previous 70 or 80 years. On November 9 of that year, on the 68th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, (ibid.) the *Ohel Jakob* Synagogue together with its adjacent Jewish museum, community offices and school was opened in the heart of Munich, establishing an unequivocal presence of Jewish life in the centre of the city that was the administrative and arguably the spiritual home of the Nazis. There seemed to be substance to the argument that the regained self-confidence expressed by celebrations of the international football victory would be beneficial for Jews, although it also contained currents of nationalism that could be perceived as unsettling.

By the end of 2018, this relative assuredness of Jewish life in Germany (albeit consistently infused with a measure of hesitation and ambivalence) had radically altered. As the substance of my interviews attest, the Jews I interviewed found themselves compelled to internally reconcile a cumulative weight of issues related to their wellbeing that were relatively much less felt before 2012. By 2019 a new level of instability had taken hold that articulated question marks about a future that, according to the key events of the intervening period, had begun to look increasingly uncertain. I witnessed how the playing out of events in both public and private spheres directly affected the sense for Jews that they could feel safe and legitimised in Germany as fully fledged members of broader society. Accordingly, ongoing doubts about the extent to which Jews felt they could engender their own self-determination in Germany metastasised during this period and remain an open question that is key to this research and beyond.

CONCLUSION

To return at last to Zadie Smith's "two histories", this thesis, through both the exegesis and creative artefact, reveals the external shifts in the contemporary political and social national landscape in which Jews in Germany collectively live, and the inside histories of "internalised reconciliations" that occur in response to those shifts within individual Jews who live in Germany. In doing so, it reveals the ways in which both research and creative practice can make a contribution to understanding the relationship between the public and the personal through the complex and vital process of ongoing negotiations of identity.

My research demonstrates how being Jewish in contemporary post-Holocaust Germany habitually activates collective and individual memory. Under various conditions, this has been the case for seven decades. The contemporary research window illuminates the transformations that have occurred in the most recent period of this socio-political landscape. It is here that I illustrate the intricacy of responses to the interwoven external and internal factors that, according to my thesis, are provoked at the nexus between memory and present experience.

As Amos Oz and his daughter, the historian Fania Oz-Salzberger, emphasise in their coauthored book *Jews and Words*, imperative to my research is the prerogative to illuminate the differentiations between individual Jews, who transcend easy compartmentalisations according to identifiable markers of origin, religiosity and generation.

> **…** The Jews, a plural noun with numerous singularities … A deep and ancient marker of Hebrew culture is the centrality of the single man or woman, created in God's image but at the same time belonging to several human pluralities … the *Mishnah* has something further to tell us: every soul is "a full world" and every such world is different from all others. This is not Western individualism but Jewish individuation. The single person is not weightier than the group, nor is the 'I' more important than the 'we'. Instead, every one of us must be infinitely important to the others and to the collective.
>
> (Oz & Oz-Salzberger 2012, p 176-180)

Such delineations, together with their historical context, are especially critical in this context where Jewish life has been for so long invisible or obscured; appropriated and constructed or reconstructed. A decisive aspect of the creative artefact is its distinctive portrayals of Jews presented in their own words, thereby as self-portraits which, mutable though these may be as with the shifting narratives of all human beings, are nonetheless pivotal in supplanting ascriptions made by others.

> Did I not really notice that Jewishness is always defined by its opposite, by the non-Jewish, by anti-Semitism, by Nazis? … I had heard quite enough about Nazis. But no one talked about Jews – or at least, not live ones.
>
> (Biller 2009)

To recontextualise Bodemann's observation of 25 years ago, “What we are witnessing today is ... a renaissance of German Jewry – but mostly on the terrain of the German public imagination” (Bodemann 1994, p. 60), my hope is that this project will contribute to further knowledge and understanding in service of moving from such illusory terrain claimed by others to self-identified alternatives that are rooted in experience, together with the complications and the contradictions of individuated existences expressed in the present moment.

My intention via this project is to provide new frames of reference via various lenses that refer to an assortment of individuals who all share the condition of living in Germany with their hybrid and personalised Jewish identities. These are those who engage with questions of what it is to be a Jew as participants in this society, and several variants of that relationship; whether tenuous, conditional or fraught, pragmatic, fluctuating, optimistic or otherwise. As such even as what I term “internalised reconciliations” take place, they are highly individualised and remain in flux. To borrow Michael Rothberg’s analogy of reforming knots (Rothberg 2010), they must be repeatedly untangled over time.

The mediated relationship between Jews and Germany means that – although we might plausibly dispense with the notion at this historical juncture that Jews live there “on packed suitcases” – they may still be said to be on tenterhooks; waiting and watching, evaluating and re-evaluating, negotiating and renegotiating the terms of their presence

in Germany where the demands of their consciences, survival instincts, hopes and fears take unprecedented shape and continue to unfold.

That being the case, the conclusion to such an exposition is, of its nature, suggestive far more than it can be decisive. The timing of this project, in a geopolitical landscape characterised by shifts towards forms of nationalism that are rarely conducive to tolerance towards Jews, may be judged as disconcerting, together with its coinciding with the final days of the last of those survivors able to testify to the endgame of such manifestations of “Imperialist Nostalgia” (ibid.) and related forms of populism. Political developments in Germany, as elsewhere, presage and have already demonstrated that Germany is not, decades after so-called ‘denazification” and more recent acts of atonement, immune from such dangers. The *Yom Kippur* shooting in Halle on 9 October, 2019, is the most recent and arguably the most chilling example of this phenomenon in recent GermanJewish memory, and exists together with tangible and existential threats emanating from other incarnations of anti-Semitism.

At the same time the mechanisms of state-sponsored atonement for the Holocaust offer at least the stated promise of protections for Jews in Germany – whether these be politically or ideologically motivated and – even allowing for regular failures of this “system”, as illustrated by the events at Halle, it could be said to afford Jews a relative sense of security in Germany. More optimistically, the emergence of a new generation less burdened by the inherited trauma that could be said to accompany the intervening generations between the Holocaust and today, as seen in the expressions of Czollek et al, together with the German-born progeny of the Soviet-born and educated *Kontingentflüchtlinge,* who vastly outnumber all other Jews in Germany, points to a reimagining of the spaces and ways in which Jews may be able to assert their presence. This, together with what appears to be arguably more widespread assertions of self-determination among Jews in Germany and rapidly growing progressive congregations in both Munich and Frankfurt, for example, bodes for a future in which the engagements of Jews with their lives, both private and public in Germany, are likely to be more “integrated” (to repurpose a contentious term) and robust.

These tightly braided strands of memory, identity, reconciliation and individuation live together outside and within Jews in Germany, as each, according to the human condition that binds us all, searches in their own singular way for somewhere to belong. In the

creative artefact that follows this exegesis can be found the shapes and textures of the lives of a handful of those who live there now, between remembering what was, living with what is, and yearning for what will be, in the place they call home.

CREATIVE ARTEFACT

EVERY SOUL A WHOLE WORLD

Never say that you are going your last way,
Though lead-filled skies above blot out the blue of day.
The hour for which we long will certainly appear,
The earth shall thunder 'neath our tread that – we are here!

From lands of green palm trees to lands all white with snow,
We are coming with our pain and with our woe,
Where'er a spurt of blood did drop,
Our courage will again sprout from that spot.

For us the morning sun will radiate the day,
And the enemy and past will fade away,
But should the dawn delay or sunrise wait too long, Then
let all future generations sing this song.

from *Zog Nit Keyn Mol "*Don't Say Never" (1943, original in Yiddish) Hirsh Glick (1922-1943) "Song of the Partisans" of Vilna

*The title "Every Soul A Whole World" is taken from the *Mishnah*, the ancient book of oral Jewish traditions

PART ONE

Chapter One
Munich, late summer 2016

There was a synagogue around the corner from our new home, hidden in the three adjoining front rooms of an apartment building that looked much like any other. Its Jewishness, like my own, lay behind an ordinary facade. It was a private place, warm inside, not all that much frequented.

A keen gaze might have spotted the signs: the brass plaque engraved with '*B'nai Brith*'; the *Mezzuzeh* on the doorpost squinting when it was struck by the midday sun; the police car stationed opposite on Friday nights. The pavement was kitted out with a regiment of concrete bollards that extended all the way to the street, where elsewhere ordinary cars were parked in conventional ways and pedestrians passed blithely by. A young man paced outside, hands buried in his pockets, a wire in one of his ears, lashes brushing up and down.

On Tuesday afternoons in the summertime, when the windows were open, a sharp ear might have made out the sounds: the clinking of cups onto saucers, the pressing of forks into plates, the lifting of slices of cake, the sprinkling of teaspoons of sugar, the smacking of lips, the kissing of cheeks, the singing of *Shtetl* songs. Inside were characters from the stories that we all knew; the ones we would never comprehend. Yet there they were, spooning the crumbs into their mouths, sipping their last drops of tea, singing the melodies soon lost. I passed by and noticed nothing.

A stack of envelopes lay in wait on the kitchen bench that was now ours, each of them stamped with an eagle. The *Hausmeister* had come by with his tools and slid a sliver of cardboard into its perspex slot. On it was printed our surnames. I eyed ours as though it were watching me. Each time I came to the entrance I fumbled in my handbag for the set of house keys to this place that was such a long way from home. The twins laughed and bounded upstairs, streaking in and out of the litter of double doorways in the empty apartment as if we were playing a game. In a few weeks' time they would start school. Then I'd be all alone. They tugged at my sleeves and slid their warm hands into mine. I let them pull me outside into the city. On street-side tables summery aperitifs flashed by.

We went on, to the famous English Gardens where foaming mugs clanged together like stones and people jumped freely into the river even as it pulled them down its icy path. The kids tore ahead on their freshly bought bicycles. I cried out to them till I was hoarse, pushing at my pedals, veering from the paths. Strangers shouted rebukes so fierce I thought they meant to run me into the traffic. On the way home, when we stopped at the market I gasped at the newborns parked in their prams outside. I felt the urge to stand guard while their mothers shopped. The ladies at their counters sniffed me out, opening their mouths to correct me with their bared teeth. I flattened my vowels and rolled my tongue, but the words caught in my throat. My kids got the gist and begged to be let loose. For their sake I tried to relent, but I lacked the knack of it. My head kept jerking around as if it was on somebody's leash.

It had been my idea to come. We had done a trial run for three months in the summer of 2012. The city had put on its best Sunday dress for us, with its rows of warm days sewn on like ribbons. We had rented a townhouse next to the English Gardens in one of Munich's oldest *viertels*, where cottages run higgledy-piggledy down Lilliputian streets. Every other week we'd taken off to visit friends on other parts of the continent. As a reconnaissance mission it was a bouquet of roses, the thorns still hidden in the folds of cellophane. When it drew time to return home, I had suggested we stay. Simon was more circumspect.

"It's been quite nice," he remarked in his typical way, "but I remember why I left."

Four years later, he turned 40, sold the business he had built from scratch with two friends, and arrived at a crossroads with its myriad routes forking away. I saw a way down one of them. My longing, cultivated since I was a kid, pulled me towards its source. I urged my husband into its orbit. I watched his eyes turn inwards, waited for them to admit some colour into the monochromatic pictures he carried like stills from another time.

Six months later, one evening after the kids had fallen asleep, he looked up from the glass of wine he'd been silently studying.

"OK, so what do you think?" He lowered the glass to the table. Condensation clung to its sides. "Shall we do it now?"

The sliding doors to the garden were pushed all the way open. We could hear the crickets' midsummer racket, an orchestra in search of a single note. I looked at Simon, waiting for him to reconsider, knowing he wouldn't.

A few weeks earlier we had returned from a Christmas trip that had stretched into February. When the festivities were over, I'd headed north on my own. Each morning I'd leant against the fridge of a Kreuzberg Air BnB shovelling muesli into my mouth before tearing out the door to meet with Jews in Berlin, the only place in Germany where the words "normal" and "Jewish" could be uttered in a sentence without catching in the throat.

Seven hundred kilometres south, Simon's parents had prepared German breakfast. Sliced meats and cheese, soft-boiled eggs sprinkled with salt from an Austrian mine we had visited with the kids, and *Bretz'n*, the chewy pretzels that symbolise Bavaria together with the sky blue and white chequerboard pattern that decorates the badges of BMWs and the handles of penknives given as presents to children. My mother-in-law's jam lay in pots on the table, its sweet flesh melted from last summer's berries from the garden. Next to them were tubs of *Quark*, the creamy curd that Lotte would spread onto her dark bread with *Marmelade.* Afterwards, I knew, there would be coffee, cocoa for the kids, then the plates would be loaded into the dishwasher, the leftovers carried on trays to their various places of lodging, the napkins rolled into their rings, the table wiped, the floor swept and vacuumed. By then it would be nearly lunchtime. There had been a great deal of snow that January. Simon had spent the rest of the days outside with Lotte and Milo, sledding up and down the slope in the meadow behind the house or packing up the skis for a nearby mountain; making the movements, hearing the sounds, breathing the air of his homeland with our kids. His mother had taught the children folk songs, cooked his favourite childhood meals.

Now it was in my hands. I knew from experience the pattern of my husband's decisionmaking. A period of intense contemplation would, at a moment impossible to predict, crystallise into a verdict. After that, if I agreed, there would be no looking back. That was my inclination. I could move like a fish in the water, nimble, responsive, but when the whole school moved as one, it would be me at the rear where I felt most at home, one eye darting behind me. Was I ready to move to Germany? Twenty years earlier Simon had left on an impulse that, as far as I knew, he had never questioned.

Twenty years earlier I was still in deep grief from the death of my father. Within a year I was pregnant with my first child, Samuel, whose birth would lighten some of my heartache and anchor me to the place I had always called home. I inhaled the warm salted air of our house by the sea and turned my eyes to the garden. The evening light was settling on the grass where our five-year-old twins loved to tumble and play with their big sister Lucia, ten years older than them. With her creative spirit, would she think of it as an adventure or a punishment? Samuel, who the other three kids adored as their soft-hearted king, was 18, away on his gap year. If we left, then when he came home, we wouldn't be there anymore. My mind swung like a metronome. Yes. No. Yes. No. Once I made my choice, it would be as good as done.

Six months later Simon had started his new job in a newly sanitised part of Munich, a 20-minute cycle ride from the old quarter where we now lived. We had sorted out our home in Sydney, packed it up into a container that was still at sea. Our farewells floated behind us like flotsam. Simon slipped back into his erstwhile home as though it were an old pair of shoes. Their edges might have been frayed and their soles worn, but they recognised the shape of his feet.

"Just laugh at them when they scold you," he suggested with a grin that bespoke the nonchalance familiarity can bestow.

I collected rebukes like souvenirs, patches woven into my clothes like targets primed to be hit.

"You can't go there". "That's incorrect". "It's forbidden". "No". "That's not how we do it here".

I flicked my palms over my grazes, hoping to disown them, propelled myself forward. I asked Simon to teach me some swear words. I took them with me into the shower where I rehearsed moral victories that abandoned me on the battleground of the streets. The mist of others' indignation hung around me as an aura even after my denouncers had long since disappeared.

I cycled to the local swimming pool and parked my bike in the grate. As I wound the lock around its wheels I lifted my head to the edifice before me, its Doric columns thrusting

from under their portico, its facade glinting. I traced my eyes up to where flags with their swastika-d banners had been hoisted not so long ago. I pictured the signs that had specified those that had been banned from entering: drunks, people with infectious diseases, Jews. I considered the entrance, with its supersized sign: *Nordbad*. Its iron doors looked built to resist me. I forced my bodyweight against them. Inside I could hear the mechanical sound of arms flapping through water. Its echo bounced off stone grandstands hewn to resemble the steps of a Roman amphitheatre where coloured towels and goggles now sat. The odour of disinfectant rose from the water into my nostrils. I paid the price of entry, pushed the turnstile, deposited my wallet and keys in the correct compartments, entered the changing cubicle and took off my shoes, my jacket, my dress, my underwear and my watch, my glasses and the pins from my hair. I tenderly hung up and laid down each of those things that belonged to me, letting my hand caress the folds of my cotton dress on its hook as I watched it drop to my side. As I lifted my eyes I read the notice that said I must leave my shoes behind and shower before entering the swimming hall. My leg made a movement towards the door, but it retracted as though it was sprung. I felt the chill of the air pressing against my naked body, cautioning me not to move from the cubicle. I turned myself around in the airless stall, looking up again and again to check the ceiling, gulping mouthfuls of air. Then I crumpled onto the bench, where I let my tears fall from my eyes onto the tiles that lay waiting for them at my feet.

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It was only by chance that I found out about the synagogue. On a Friday afternoon at a flea market an hour out of town, a man told me it was there. Our container from Sydney was still another month away. We were in the market to buy interim pots and pans, crockery and cutlery, perhaps a few chairs; anything to stave off a trip to Ikea. Our apartment, still owned by the family that built it in 1907, was laid with oak parquetry that creaked with each step as though it was trying to talk to us. Its rooms opened onto one another so that you could walk from end to end without using the corridor. Hanging from each ceiling were lightbulbs that swung gently in the summer breeze. The double-glazed windows moaned like a chorus, one after the other, as I opened them to the street. At the far end of the apartment, on the side where the sun streamed in, were the service rooms: a rickety kitchen just big enough for the five of us to sit around the table to eat. If somebody dropped their knife, we could reach into the cutlery drawer for a new one

without leaving our seats. Behind it, separated by a sliding door, was a built-in pantry room about the size of an elephant. Some days, when I could hear the kids playing happily in their room, I pulled the door to, slid down onto the floor so that my back pressed against the washing machine and, as I inhaled its cleansing perfume, let it churn at my back. I gazed at the few sheets and towels that I had folded neatly on the shelves with small pieces of soap tucked between the layers in the way I had learned from my *Buba* and let the sunlight wash over me as a salve. At night I lay in bed and scanned the stucco on the ceiling 12 feet above us. I found garlands of flowers, a hundred years old, that made my eyes twirl in circles until I fell asleep at last. We had been warned not to try to drill anything into the walls, which were as crumbly as biscuits. All sorts of things had been found inside them; balls of out-of-date newspaper, bits of crockery, wartime rubble. Downstairs in the cellar was a storage space allotted to the apartment. Simon carried down boxes of gear for skiing and hiking in the mountains that could be reached in less than an hour. I asked him what it was like down there. He said I should go down, it looked 'very original'. I shook my head.

Half an hour out of town in a series of rambling warehouses, middle-aged men sold trinkets from bygone times. I remembered being reproached by an American I'd met once in Berlin when I had told him of my fondness for flea markets.

"You wanna eat your food off Nazi plates?"

Now that I was living in Munich, I figured that was inevitable. Lucia, who would turn 16 a few weeks later, found a pristine 1970s Pentax at the bottom of a basket, the first in a collection of film cameras she would use as her third eye to the city. She had cried when we told her we were moving here. She could stay with her father, she had pleaded. In the end she had gamely come along, stepped into a world that would open before her as a portal, more than anything to herself.

Simon held up an old Bavarian farmer's jacket in dun-coloured suede. I recognised its shape. Similar ones were worn every day by farmers and tradespeople in the village where his parents lived. On the streets of Munich other versions could be seen. They were more likely to be made of dark felt and paired with tailored trousers and cut away collars instead of checkered shirts and *Lederhosen*. These days people wore matching outfits each year to the *Wies'n*, the October beer festival that begins in September where

tourists in made-in-China miniskirted *Dirndls* stumble past clans of *von Something-orothers* in their floor-length handmade velvet *Tracht* of black and emerald green. My mother-in-law had told me that the 68ers, the post-war generation who pointed violent fingers at their parents, had for decades made it deeply unfashionable to wear the clothing that had been so emphatically endorsed by the Nazis. In recent years that had changed. Perhaps enough time was considered to have passed. Simon was trying on the jacket, squatting and turning around before a dusty mirror so that he could see how it looked from the back, where a long pleat fell from between his shoulder blades like an inverted knife.

My eyes were drawn to the delicate blue and white botanical pattern of a *Hutschenreuther* tea set on the table beside where I stood. I remembered its distinctive design from the first time we had been invited for *Kaffee und Kuchen* at Simon's grandmother's apartment, a few years before she died. *Oma*, whose name was Elfriede, was a dear woman with kind brown eyes. During the war she had worked as a radio assistant for the *Wermacht*. In late 1945 she had met Harold, an American soldier stationed in post-war Bavaria. They fell in love, and in June 1947, six months after Harold had been sent back to South Carolina, Simon's father was born. Elfriede and Harold were both 19, poor as church mice. They wrote to each other for a few years, the wide-eyed correspondence of late adolescence. They yearned to be reunited. Without money and belonging to enemy nations, their chances were nil. Eventually they both married other people and had more children, but years later it emerged both had privately insisted that each was the love of their lives. When I met *Oma* I felt the instant kinship that arises when you encounter somebody pure of heart. She took my hand in hers and didn't let go until she had finished telling me the story of her year-long romance with Harold, in English. Simon and his parents were silent, although their mouths were open. *Oma* hadn't spoken English for 60 years. I remembered the rim of the cup that Sunday afternoon, so cold and smooth, gentle against my lips. Later I read that *Hutschenreuther*, like so many other porcelain factories in the town of Selb, in northern Bavaria, had used slave labour in the 1930s and 40s to produce their crockery. They manufactured various series during those years. According to contemporary trends, each vessel or plate was stamped with a swastika.

At the flea market we crossed over a carriageway that must have once been used to transport goods on its rusted rails. It was vacant now and took us to an annexe with more

wares. Flimsy particleboard barriers separated stalls selling Art Deco gilt and mid-century kitsch. My eyes briefly met those of an old man with a face like a falcon selling war medals to a couple who appeared transfixed by the transaction. I glared at his back and turned to another man in his mid-fifties. I found warmth in his eyes and clung to them. I noticed when he spoke that instead of carrying jagged edges, his words came out plump like raisins. There was something in their sing-song lilt, in the way he moved his shoulders that lifted my veil for a moment. I blushed. An improbable thought occurred to me, but I brushed it aside. He was selling vintage household wares. I held up an enamel bread tin and turned it over to see it was stamped with a rooster motif, a relic from the GDR. On a rustic bench were a pair of porcelain wall lamps from the *Jugendstil* era, pear-shaped and threaded with cloth cables. Beside them was a small brass clock. I approached him and we fell into conversation. He told me he had been here for 25 years, finding old things, fixing them up, selling them.

“You’re not from here?” I ventured. “Your accent, it sounds familiar to me.” I dared not mention my suspicion, and counter-intuitively prepared myself to learn that he was Turkish or Persian. He held my gaze forcefully. When he said ‘Israel’ the r gargled from the base of his throat. I wanted to hug him on the spot, invite myself over for *Shabbas* dinner, meet his wife and kids. Instead, I said,

“Twenty five years?”

“Yes,” he replied, “It just happened. I came here, fell in love with a German woman, we have two children…” He shrugged. “It’s life.”

I leaned in as close as I could without alarming him, although I doubted he was easily frightened.

“But how… how is it for you here?” His head jerked over his left shoulder in the direction of the falcon-faced man.

“There are some of that kind still here, but you learn how to deal with them, and most people, they are not like him.”

We exchanged names, sketches of our lives. I mentioned our neighbourhood and Amir's face brightened.

"There's a synagogue on G-strasse," he said.

"R-r-really?" I stuttered.

I knew of only two synagogues in Munich. The *Ohel Jakob*, designed by the famed architect Daniel Libeskind, stood as a monolith in Sankt-Jakobsplatz in the heart of the city where it had been planted six years earlier. It was possible to approach its quadratic facade from all sides but it could only be entered via oversized steel doors that were set into their stone surround like the gates to a crypt. Outside of the services, which were closely guarded, the doors were permanently sealed. When I made it inside one Friday evening, I perceived its shrouded beauty at last. The atrium had been designed to receive light, which fell in through a thick band of sky high windows, enveloping the congregants with a glow that could only be described as heavenly. I didn't care much for the service, which was orthodox. That meant I was shunted to the side with the other women behind a golden grille that made my eyes mis-focus. The other synagogue I knew was the reform *Beth Shalom*, buried inside a featureless office building in the suburbs. On a trip to Munich earlier that year I had arrived late one *Shabbas* evening after losing my way so many times I had nearly retreated. Libeskind had designed plans for a new synagogue for this congregation too, I had heard whispered, but they had been shelved due to lack of funds, or to interference from more consummate political players, depending on which version you preferred. In either instance it was apparent that this was the second synagogue, not the one chosen to represent resurgent Jewish life in Germany in the middle of the city where the Nazis had stolen and cemented their power. It seemed out of kilter to me. It was in Germany that reform Judaism had been invented. Now it played second fiddle to the orthodox community that had emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust, constructed by survivors from elsewhere. In the reform *Shul* I had found the proportions reversed, so that the beauty could be found not in the walls but in the rabbi's spirit, which radiated wisdom, tolerance and warmth.

I turned back to Simon. He was nodding at me rhythmically in the way he does when I fail to grasp something obvious.

“Haven’t you seen the synagogue near our place?” he prodded me.

I scanned mental images of the precinct where we lived. The whole area had been constructed within a few years during a housing boom in the early 1900s, so that most of the buildings were variations on the same Art Nouveau theme, each of them painted in pastel hues that must have looked to the birds like chocolate wrappers. Every so often apartment blocks from the 1950s and 60s popped up beside them, like poor cousins. These were the places where the bombs had fallen. None of the buildings, new or old, registered to me as a synagogue.

“It’s near the corner of I-strasse,” Simon prompted, his face contorting into a frown-smile. “Haven’t you seen the police cars?”

At last, I pictured the green and white BMW stationed in its designated parking spot opposite a typical *Altbau* building. I must have been past it a dozen times already. Amir suggested I go there. They would be glad to have someone extra, he said. They often don't have enough people to form a *Minyan* (the quorum of 10 Jews over *Bar Mitzvah* age that is required to hold a service).

“But is it religious?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied.

“Then having an extra woman there wouldn’t make a difference,” I protested.

“Yes, but go anyway. They would be glad to have you.”

He asked if we knew about the Jewish primary school in Jakobsplatz. Perhaps we might want to send our twins there? I opened my mouth. I had looked at the website and turned it over a few times in my thoughts, I’d mentioned it in passing to Simon, but had set it aside. I understood it was attached to the orthodox community and I assumed it would be too religious for us. Amir demurred.

“You’ll find every kind of Jew there,” he grinned. “Some Christians too.”

I let his words bounce off me. I knew that Simon was fixed on sending the kids to the local school. That was what people did in Germany. It fitted with his own beliefs. I moved my eyes towards his, left them there for longer than I could credit, then turned back to Amir.

“We’ve decided to send them to the neighbourhood school,” I replied. “We really like the idea that it’s a public school, they can walk there, get to know the local kids, be in the normal system.”

Amir listened politely and nodded slowly without altering his expression.

“Well, if you change your minds, you should talk to my friend.” He gave me her name and continued as though he could read my suppressed thoughts. “If you call her, feel free to mention my name. Our kids went there. She’ll be delighted to hear from you.”

My eyes looked at him but I felt their gaze turn inwards, towards something I’d pushed down inside me.

“You might find it helps,” he added quietly.

Late that Friday afternoon we arrived back home with our haul of light fittings, bread bin and clock. Lucia took the Pentax into her bedroom, Simon hung up his farmer’s jacket. I washed the dirt from the tea set in the sink and laid it on the kitchen shelf. Then I put on my shoes, gently pulled our front door closed behind me and creaked down the treads from our second-floor apartment to the entrance to our building. The coloured tiles in the vestibule glinted, jewels beneath my feet. I counted another 200 steps or so, which took me to the corner I was looking for.

I clocked the two young officers in their police car from the periphery of my vision, but I didn’t turn back. I moved forward like a cinematographer’s camera, fastened to tracks. The apartment block contemplated the police with a dusty expression. Its facade was painted pale grey. From over the sturdy wooden entrance a video camera trained its lens onto the footpath. The doors were pulled shut. I saw the *Mezzuzeh*, the brass plaque, the bollards. The galleried windows on the first and second floors reflected the building across the street, rebuilt over the remains of what must have stood there before. I felt

the officers' eyes on my back. I turned and swung towards them, showing them that I knew they were there, although I was too afraid to meet their eyes.

My feet stuck me to the spot. I was an island past which pedestrians moved on either side, their eyes fixed on their destinations. I looked back up at the windows, squinted as though that might help me see through to something inside, then I turned and lifted my feet, joining the flow of the others, and walked home.

Chapter Two

Shortly before the school year was due to start, we were asked to attend a meeting at our local primary school where we planned to enrol Lotte and Milo for the first class. They were not yet six, which made them slightly young for the German system. They had already completed more than half a year of school in Australia, so they could read, write, add up and speak German fluently. A few days earlier, when we'd taken them to a bilingual *Vorschule* by way of comparison, their verdict had been clear: "This is for babies."

Through a grubby set of glass doors set into a 1960s bunker that looked as if it could have been constructed from 8-dot Lego blocks stacked on top of each other, we made out a dank hallway. We rang the bell half a dozen times before a janitor appeared with a Bavarian brogue so thick I had to rely on his gestures for guidance. To the left was a doorway where the principal, an angular woman in her early 60s with greying blonde hair, stood with her arm already outstretched like a rod. Beside her was another woman of similar age and hairstyle, slightly softer in form. They pointed to our chairs and got down to business right away. The second woman took the children, one by one, into an adjoining room for testing while we remained in the principal's office. Given their age and the short time we had been in Germany, she warned us, the twins were unlikely to be accepted. The school reserved the right to the final say on that adjudication. In any case it might be as well for Lotte and Milo to acclimatise for another year in a local pre-school, she advised. I made a nodding movement as though a hand was moving my head up and down on a string. The children were convinced they wanted to start primary school. Simon, his parents, my mother and my stepfather thought likewise. I was hesitating. I had already decided to let Simon do the talking.

While we waited for each of the kids to return from their questioning, the principal held us at her desk and posed us a series of questions, the answers to which she typed into a computerised template: names, address, dates of birth, immunisation history and so forth. I distracted myself by trying to measure the sharpness of her tone against the way her fingertips pecked at the keyboard. After ten minutes or so her colleague emerged from the ante-room with Milo without any hint as to how he had performed. His face beamed as though it had been lit by the sunshine we could see outside. She released him and took in Lotte. All the while Simon continued to answer queries. The principal kept on, duly tapping them into her system. At last the second teacher emerged from next door with Lotte, who flung herself at me. I could sense from the rate of her breathing that she was calm. She lifted her face towards mine and I kissed the crown of her head, breathing in the scent of her freshly washed hair. Milo was bursting to speak, but he was silenced by both women with a curt “Sshhhhttt.”

The teacher handed the paperwork to her boss, who reviewed it carefully. Her mouth curled slightly, betraying a modicum of surprise. Her colleague attempted something of a smile. She had to admit that the children had done very well. No decision had yet been made yet, of course. Together with the principal she would have to examine a number of factors. She had a question, however, which she hurled at Simon like a basketball she’d been concealing, hoping to wind him with it in the stomach.

“*Welches ist dann der Muttersprache, Englisch oder Deutsch*?” Which is the mother tongue, then – English or German?

Her tone seemed to say: “What kind of trickery have you been up to abroad, teaching your children to speak so fluently that they already sound like native speakers?” Simon answered with typical diplomacy. Neither woman seemed much satisfied by his answer. The principal continued her questionnaire. Now she came to religion.

“Catholic or Protestant?” she asked, presenting us with a binary choice so axiomatic that she found it unnecessary to turn her head or raise her eyes over the frames of her glasses.

“Well,” began Simon, whose parents are among a sizeable minority of post-war born Germans who chose to abandon religion more or less altogether. “I don’t really have any religion. My sister and I weren’t baptised,” he offered.

“We grew up celebrating Christmas, but that was pretty much all.”

The principal nodded in recognition.

“And my wife,” he continued, turning to me, his right leg lazily crossed over his left so that I could see the stripes of his socks between his trousers and his shoes.

“My wife is Jewish.” He grinned.

Nobody spoke or moved. The principal took off her glasses, laid them on the table, and put them back on, as though in that movement she might have cleared them of some dust that had been hampering her vision. I heard her swallow. Her companion moved her eyes from Simon to the children, then back again. After a few moments, he cleared his throat, as though to rouse the pair of them, and prompted them amiably.

“So, I think you can put down that they’re Jewish.”

The women turned their heads towards me in slow motion without seeming to move their bodies, like reptiles in an enclosure who had become aware of a tapping on the glass. I thought they might be able to hear my heartbeat. I clutched Lotte to my chest and held my body upright while I tried to meet their gaze. I considered the words, so slight in their number, that Simon had just spoken. If he hadn’t said them, I doubted I would have been able to.

The principal pivoted back to her computer, floated her hands over the keyboard and, I could only surmise, typed “Jewish” next to our children’s names. It occurred to me then that it would probably be recorded in a state register. She swivelled back to us and asked with a new, brightened demeanour.

“Well then, Catholic, Protestant … or Ethics?” the third option apparently only now having occurred to her.

Simon turned to me, and for the first time since we had been introduced to the teachers, I spoke.

“Ethics,” I proclaimed in what I hoped was a convincing accent.

The women’s mouths assumed the shape of polite smiles. Those small movements seemed to act as catalysts for a series of transformations that developed in increments thereafter. They laughed a few times. The principal loosened her posture and turned to us encouragingly, moving her eyes like a vaudeville actor. Then an extraordinary thing happened: her colleague looked over the paperwork from her closed-door discussions with the children and began using her index finger to point out certain things to the principal. The pair of them began nodding rhythmically. The principal spontaneously suggested that Lotte and Milo would almost certainly be accepted. Yes, she was quite sure of it. She turned to her colleague, who carried on with her harmonised head movements. Yes, she was certain too. The principal told us they would post us all the necessary information, then the two of them stood up, walked in file to our side of the desk and one after the other began shaking our hands vigorously while leading us towards the exit, like a couple of Basil Fawlty *doppelgängers* trying to distract us from the body they had hidden behind them, whose dead arm they had only just noticed was hanging out of the cupboard.

Outside on the street the kids ran for their bikes. Simon grinned and made a joke about how the women had suddenly become about 40 per cent nicer. He was thrilled that the kids would be starting school straightaway and suggested we go for a celebratory lunch. I laughed nervously and moved towards my bicycle. I noticed how the sun was dodging the leaves of the trees in places, leaving smears of its light that illuminated the pavement here and there. I felt them around me like the patches of water in the ocean that could feel alternately cold and hot, but never seemed to warm me.

In the months that followed I found myself relaying this encounter to new friends by way of therapy as much as anecdote. On separate occasions, when I got to the part when Simon tells the principal and her colleague that I’m Jewish, some of our friends anticipated what came next.

“Let me guess, they started being much nicer,” they prompted, laughing and reading the lines of the exchange like a well-charted map.

At a dinner party one night, a friend from a well-known Munich family who had converted to Judaism in the 1990s when he married his American wife recounted his own experience. Their eldest son was by now already in his 20s. When he was in primary school, Ethics was not yet an available option, which meant the options were twofold: Catholic, the more or less official religion of Bavaria, or Protestant. Our friend approached the principal in person to discuss how to proceed. When he arrived for the meeting, the school director was sitting at his desk, his left forefinger marking a spot against a name on a list while he used the pen in his other hand to cross-check some information. When our friend mentioned that his son was Jewish and enquired what that might mean when the kids would be separated into their religion classes, the principal raised his gaze. What was his name? Our friend provided the information.

“He’s Jewish, you say?” the principal enquired as though he must have misheard.

“Yes.”

The principal put down his pen, stood up, shook our friend’s hand in farewell and gave his reply.

“Oh in that case I think we’ll put him with the Protestants.”

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One evening our doorbell rang. The children and Simon were at home. I walked down our corridor expecting a courier with a parcel for somebody else or the *Hausmeister* come to check the old wiring. Instead I looked through the peephole and found a 10year-old girl the same height as me; Cosima, one of our neighbours from downstairs. In her trembling hands she held out a small chocolate cake wearing the shape of the *Bundt* mould in which it had been baked. Its surface was covered in sprinkles of icing sugar, some of which had spilled onto its patterned plate.

“I made this for you,” she said in English softly laced at its corners with her mother tongue.

She handed it over, said goodbye, turned and flew back downstairs before I could call out more than thank you. I heard the clink of the latch on the door to the apartment below as I stood in our doorway inhaling the cake's freshly baked warmth.

A few evenings later, we heard the buzz of our doorbell again. Cosima's parents Nicole and her husband Florian were there, inviting us for a glass of wine, right away if we liked. The twins were already sleeping and Lucia was at home so we grabbed a bottle of red and padded down the treads in the hand-knitted socks Simon's mum gave us every year at Christmas. As the weeks followed, one by one we met the other eight or so families and couples who lived in our building, each bringing us, to one degree or another, into their chapters of a shared book. Lucia and I were the only non-native German speakers. A couple of neighbours informed us one day that a collective decision had been made: henceforth they would speak to us in German. If we liked we could reply in English, but wouldn't it be good for us if we did likewise? I let out a squeak, amused that they had taken it upon themselves to set the terms of our education. They tilted their heads to the side, as though I might explain the joke.

One afternoon our next door neighbour dropped off something belonging to her son, one of the friendship books that I'd noticed young children here often share. On each double page were questions to be filled in so that eventually the owner would have a volume brimming with the names, ages, heights, places of birth, favourite colours and food and animals of their family and friends. As I flicked through to some empty pages for Lotte and Milo to write in, I noticed that the grandparents of this boy, a lovely couple who lived upstairs from them, came from a place only 20 kilometres away. It was not Dachau the concentration camp where they had been born at least a decade after the war had ended, but the town that had always been there, right beside it.

Before long the twins were running up and down to play with neighbours upstairs and down or leaning long and loudly on our doorbell to make mischief at our place. When Lotte and Milo celebrated their sixth birthday in late September, six weeks after we had arrived, all of their guests were our neighbours' kids, including the children of the Romanian-Italian couple who ran the café downstairs. They could be relied upon for news and gossip, for taking receipt of packages and keeping hold of house keys, for making decent coffee and serving salted or sugared treats, and not least for the great

comfort that comes when foreigners feel the urge to exchange war stories when the city outside threatens to crush us. I didn't tell them I was Jewish, being Australian was enough.

Chapter Three
Munich, Autumn 2016

One Sunday not long after we had arrived, Simon's parents parked their car on the footpath in front of our apartment building, opened the boot and together pulled out a large piece of furniture that had stood over Simon and I in the room where we slept whenever we stayed at their home. Varnished to the lustre of chestnut casings, it was a bit taller than me and far more prepossessing. From the outside it looked like an armoire, but when you pulled at its largest drawer, instead of sliding outwards it fell down to become a writing desk, behind which numerous compartments were revealed. Some of them could be locked with small brass keys. Others at first glance couldn't be recognised as drawers at all. Each compartment spoke in its own particular way when you opened it. Even with its stolid proportions, their housing stumbled and swayed with the weight of its contents. I guessed it had been built in the Biedermeier period, in the first half of the 19th century. At my in-laws' place it had stood out, a stranger next to the painted farmer's cupboards, 20th-century design pieces and the various built-in furniture like the traditional beech dining nook where each of us had our own cushion embroidered with our first-name initial and a matching motif. Lucia's was a light, Lotte's was a ladder, Sammy had a pair of skis and Simon a sailing boat. Milo had his own moon. Mine was a forest flower whose name evaporated every time I heard it.

My mother-in-law had explained years before that this heavy thing was known as a *Sekretäre*, a sort of vertical desk that had been used to compose and reply to letters, to write up invoices and inventories. Its various niches would have stored paperwork and small treasures. I supposed it must have denoted the status of its owner, both literate and in possession of a certain amount of taste. Ever since she could remember, the Sekretäre had stood in her adored grandfather's otherwise unremarkable living room. After he had died, she had asked if she could have it. Now she wanted to give it to us, as a sort of housewarming present.

“I thought you should have it,” she said, addressing both Simon and I although her eyes met mine. “You remember the story of how my grandfather got hold of it.”

I moved my face towards the *Sekretäre,* expressionless as a sentry against our living room wall. I looked into its brass eyes and pierced them for the memories it held locked away somewhere in those secret chambers. Nobody spoke any words to that effect, but I sensed the circle on the history we shared draw to a modest close.

When his parents had left, I told Simon it meant a lot that his parents had given it to us. Perhaps this treasure chest that had given itself up to save its owners lives, as I dearly hoped it had, would feel as much at home with us here as it could anywhere now.

“It’s nice to think we’ll be its guardians from now on,” I said.

Perhaps the reverse might be true, it occurred to me. Simon smiled with measured pride. I asked him to tell me the story again. He moved towards the *Sekretäre* and faced it so that at first it seemed he was explaining to it, rather than to me.

“Well, my great-grandfather had quite a few things that he had collected over the years,” he began as he reached over to stroke its veneer with his fingertips.

“They were very poor. One part of the family were farmers, the others were lumberjacks who had a transport business. In winter it was a horse and sled, in summer it was a horse and cart. They would transport anything for local people, for businesses… it was like a courier service or a trucking business in those days.

“They lived in southern Bavaria in a village in the mountains close to the Austrian border.”

He turned to me so that I could picture the landscape in his irises. I nodded, prodding him to continue.

“The mountains there are not very high but they’re very steep and quite rocky, so the terrain is very hard to handle,” he continued, moving his hands between us to denote the contours.

“They knew all the forest roads and as far as I know my great-grandfather helped a number of Jewish families escape, I guess into Austria, maybe further, certainly over the Alps.”

He turned to examine a mark on the brightly polished timber which he began to rub at with a bit of spit on the end of his index finger. The *Sekretäre* held its composure as though it was waiting for him to finish, like a child having the remnants of dinner scrubbed from the corners of its mouth.

“They paid him in whatever they had. So at the time he had a whole lot of candelabras and silver and things like that, but he tried to get rid of them as quickly as possible and sell them elsewhere because it was dangerous to have them.”

He halted briefly to exchange a quick glance with me, anticipating my thoughts.

“He took payment obviously, but at least he did it. He risked his life, because if he had been caught it would not have been good for him,” he insisted, his restraint underscoring his words.

“They were very pragmatic people,” he added.

I made a joke about that characteristic having been passed down. Simon smiled briefly but his thoughts were elsewhere. He had remembered something else that was setting his eyes alight.

“He was really quite a character, you know. He was known to be a big personality and a risk-taker. I’m pretty sure he went to prison once because he punched someone for insulting his wife or something like that.” He smiled.

“He stood up for what he believed in. He was apparently a great guy, as far as I know.” He opened his mouth as though there was something else, then shut it again. “That’s really all I know.”

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A few weeks later it was *Yom Kippur*, the most important day in the Jewish calendar. Nostalgia had been squeezing my heart. I yearned for my mum, whose name is Zina, but who is otherwise known as “Gaga” to all of our acquaintance under about 21, an apt moniker that my eldest son Sammy gave her in lieu of ‘Grandma’ at the age of one. Today I thought especially of my father, as Jews do on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, when we reflect on the past and pray with deep respect to the dead.

The children were at school down the road, Simon was at work. I was alone at home. A surge of purpose I couldn’t explain made me rise from the kitchen table with my tea still steaming in my cup like rust after the rain. I grabbed my basket and heard our front door bang behind me, jumped on my bike and pedalled to the market till my thighs were aflame. I bought smoked salmon and herring, pickled cucumbers and eggs, horseradish, onions, fresh chicken livers, duck fat and salted Bavarian *Laugenzöpfe* that would have to stand in for the *Challah*. On the way home, I pushed my laden bicycle towards an intersection from which I could take my pick of the streets that formed an orderly grid. Depending on whether I turned left or right, now or later, each of them would take me home. I instinctively chose the one that would bring me past the synagogue, even though I didn’t intend to go in. As I approached and my eyes focused on the pavement outside, I understood my purpose. I felt a deep need to be near another Jew. Any Jew.

An Israeli, young and handsome as a prince, was stationed outside. He scrutinised me mildly and eyed my bags of shopping. I dropped the words “*Yom Kippur*” like a passcode and gave him my précis: Australian Jew newly arrived in Munich seeks synagogue service.

“You wanna speak English?” he suggested, visibly relaxing. He told me he’d been in Munich for a fortnight, as he moved one foot after the other off the footpath as though it was burning the soles of his feet. He wasn’t sure what time the evening service would start – he thought around seven o’clock, close to sunset. I could come back then, no problem.

On the Day of Atonement, Jews reflect on the previous year, acknowledge our mistakes, and ask for forgiveness. We seek humility and pray to be included in the *Book of Life*, a figurative tome that God writes in, for the following year. As with all Jewish holidays, *Yom Kippur* begins and ends at sunset. It’s a solemn 24 hours. The requirement for all women

and men over *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* age is to fast unless they are pregnant or unwell. In the synagogue the services run all day. The rabbis are dressed entirely in white, to reflect the innocence of life and death, as far as I've always understood it. They wear canvas shoes instead of leather out of respect to any animal who may have suffered to clothe us. In the afternoon is the *Yizkor* service, the holiest of holies on this sacred day, when we remember the dead and recite the *Kaddish*. Only when you are over 13 can you attend. I remembered the feeling of initiation that took place after my *Bat Mitzvah,* as I moved from playing with the other kids outside in the spring sunshine on long *Yom Kippur* afternoons to taking my place with my parents inside the *Shul*, swaying in the collective claustrophobia as the rabbi read out the litany of names of every congregation member who had died since the synagogue was inaugurated. One second to mark each life. I didn't know then that on the *Yom Kippur* after I turned 21, my father's name would be among them. Then the rabbi would recite the names of some of the concentration camps where those countless Jews had been murdered: Buchenwald, Dachau, Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibór, Majdanek, Bergen Belsen, Treblinka, Auschwitz.

Even relatively secular Jews like me tend to observe *Yom Kippur* to one degree or another. We might make private negotiations as to its requirements but even the atheists among us find it hard to give up this day of reflection that is so familiar, so integral to our understanding of who we are, no matter our personal or stated beliefs. With our thoughts sharpened by hunger, our hearts cleaving to the dead, our memories transporting us to that precious handful of serious childhood days, it's tough to turn away. For Jews like me it also gives rise to the buried thought that maybe there is a God. If that turns out to be true, then *Yom Kippur* is our annual insurance policy.

As with everything in Jewish life, in the end there is food. The feast at sunset known as "the Breaking of the Fast", is fantasised about all day long. The first mouthful is a golden piece pulled from the round eggy *Challah*, sometimes studded with sultanas that we eat in the ten days from *Rosh Hashanah* to *Yom Kippur* to symbolise the turning of life from the old year to the new. Then, in my family's version of the Ashkenazi tradition, there is chopped liver with pickled cucumbers and hot horseradish relish; *gefilte* fish with carrot slices; egg mashed with mayonnaise and chives; smoked salmon lox, *Bismarck* herring with sour cream and red onion and "Danish" (*Matjes)* herring with apples and vinegar. Then chicken soup with golden *Lokshen*, leftover pieces of *Challah,* is dipped in to soak up every drop.

I left the Israeli to his footpath dance, lugged my shopping up the stairs until I could lean my forehead against our front door and try to catch my breath while the canvas bags dug welts into my palms, went inside, unpacked and began to prepare. I swung a white lace cloth over our dining table. Its legs, painted in chalky grey, held up a long narrow pine board that in turn held a pair of drawers hidden at each end. It had originally come from a convent in Belgium. I liked its patina, how it held its secrets. Having made the return transcontinental journey it sat at one end of our apartment under picture windows whose gaze fell onto a row of birch trees running down our street. Its legs rattled as I pulled out the drawers where I had tucked away candles and matches, my grandmother's silver cutlery set and the kindergarten *Challah* cover that my mother had pressed into my hands as we had left, with its bright, lopsided embroidery. I remembered how my chubby hands had pointed the needle in and out of the cloth nearly four decades earlier, weaving in mistakes that I now traced with my fingertips.

I had never made my mum's famous chopped liver. She had always made it. I washed the liver and cooked it in *schmalz*, threw in the onions to caramelise and the hard boiled eggs. I made the two types of herring and the egg *mush.* I chopped the pickles, arranged the smoked salmon and improvised with the Bavarian bread. I remembered as a kid eyeing off the small glass bowls of brain-popping horseradish relish that were always on the Friday night table; one white, which my *Buba* used to make from scratch and bring to us from Melbourne with jars of garlicky Polish pickles from Pose's delicatessen in Carlton. The other type was beetroot pink. I would watch, awestruck, as the grownups spooned trails of it onto slices of *Challah* schmeared with chopped liver or forkfuls of *Buba's* snow white *gefilte* fish. Fear did away with desire until I grew up, so I contented myself with the sound of its name. It was something that came from the back of the throat that I very much doubted could be spelled with Latin letters. The Ch in *Chrayin* is not what you need for Charlotte or charming; it's a kind of gargle, the sound you make when you clear your throat. I picked up the jar of horseradish purée I had bought at the market to decant into a glass bowl. On the label it said something that made me start: "*Kren"*. All those pieces that had floated in my mind since childhood slid down my throat like I'd swallowed the whole jar. I could hear the 17th century Polish *Shtetl* Jews, newly arrived in "The Holy Roman Empire of German Nation" straining to get their mellifluous tongues around the local dialect, turning *Kren* into *Chrayin* and setting in motion a sound that travelled across continents and time.

Over the years there had been many *Yom Kippurs*, especially those between late adolescence and motherhood, when I hadn't been to *Shul*, when I had decided not to fast or I had done so half-heartedly, stealing a sip of tea or a dark square of chocolate that left its dry aftertaste. Those private acts of rebellion or indifference were never satisfying, yet they signalled the ambivalence I had been fomenting. That was something easy enough to carry around in a place like Sydney, where being Jewish was no more or less remarkable than any number of things, and where I could rely on my family and childhood friends to convene an atmosphere around me that I could imbibe just by pulling a piece of *Challah* from the loaf my mother had bought and letting it melt on my tongue. In my teens and twenties I had pulled away even from my peripheral position in the community. I had lamented what I dismissed as its insularity. I had sought out others. I had yearned to taste what I hadn't much known. My equivocation waxed and waned over the years relative to myriad factors I probably couldn't have named. But it was no strenuous thing. I could resist in the most casual of ways, knowing I could slip my Jewishness back on like a jacket.

Now here I was on *Yom Kippur* with a Bavarian state-stamped certificate of residence for our new address. My jacket was pulled tight around my shoulders. It was holding me up on the hook I was pinned to and it wouldn't set me free until I made my choice. I considered my options. I wasn't convinced about the orthodox synagogue around the corner, although I hadn't yet been inside it. I wasn't yet so committed as to schlep to the reform *Shul* across town. Yet neither was I so complacent as to cast myself a spectator to this moment, to let it all slip unnoticed into the mouth of Germanness that would surely swallow it whole. I felt myself being beckoned: to activate my slumbering Jewishness or to let it hibernate here, where either it could be fed so that it could live, or it would surely die. Being Jewish in Germany loomed as a great binary: Yes? or No? If there was an inbetween, I couldn't see it.

To my astonishment, I didn't hesitate. I forbade myself from tasting even a morsel of the feast I had made until everybody else was home from school and work and the sky was darkening. Only then did I grab a piece from the *Challah* that I had warmed, with its saltcrusted skin that should have been sweeter. Only then, with Simon and the three kids glued to my newfound resolve like it was a high wire act, did I taste its fluffy flesh. Simon had already begun piling his plate with something of everything on the table.

“Is it good? Does it need more salt? I should have used more salt,” I heard myself reciting lines from my fore-mothers’ song sheet.

He shook his head and rubbed his hands together to signal his delight, his mouth already in motion. The twins were slathering butter onto the warm bread, then scooping up and spreading on the mashed up, mayonnaised egg and folding the two halves together, titling their heads to the side as they opened their mouths. Lucia got up from her chair and as she did I rose instinctively too. We met at the end of the table, close to the door. Without saying a word, we put our arms around each other. I felt the heat of her breath as she lowered her head onto my bare shoulder. Her wet lashes caressed my skin with butterfly kisses.

“Gaga would be proud of you,” she whispered.

I squeezed her and felt the slightness of her frame against mine. I raised my eyes towards Amir’s clock. It was too late for synagogue now. It didn’t matter. If God existed, She was in my kitchen.

Chapter Four

At six, Milo was already established as a kid who makes friends wherever he goes. At the playground, in the supermarket, on public transport. For the first few months after we arrived, he told anyone who would listen in flawless German that we are Australian, that we had just moved to Munich, that he and Lotte are twins, and that, if they had heard him speaking English to his mum and wondered why his German was so good, it was because his dad comes from Munich. Then he would laugh so heartily that droplets of joy would fall on all those around him, impossible to resist.

I had been forewarned that *Münchner* are notoriously unfriendly or worse, most often by Germans from other parts of the country. I had seen young mothers foisting their jumbo prams like *Panzers*, repelling 80-year-olds trying to get on the tram in the rain when they deemed the carriage to be already too full. I had held the doors open with one arm till it bruised and with my other hand pulled the old people inside. I had walked the children to school, one on each side, holding their hands and skipping down the sidewalks, then turned my head for a moment to hear one or the other of our now six-year-olds scream in pain as an middle-aged passerby shoved them out of the way, turning back to berate me for letting them monopolise the pavements. I had stood with my mouth agape and tended to my kids. But with Milo at my side the city was transformed into a film set where special effects could turn everything dull into a rainbow of colours. Grumpy shop assistants, ranting pedestrians, self-appointed law enforcers, all of them softened in his hands, if they gave him half a chance. It didn't always work. Some nuts were too hard to crack. In those cases Milo had no trouble letting them have it.

"You don't have to be so rude!" he would call out after them. "You could just try to be nice!"

Lotte observed it all with her wise eyes. At home and with friends she's a chatterbox, but in public she is more circumspect. Her way is to stand back and watch until she sees into the heart of things.

In a local Italian restaurant one November evening, Milo charmed the couple at the next table with lively information about our provenance and adventures. They had travelled once to Australia and knew of our merry-go-round of prime ministers. Donald Trump had

been elected president of the US a few days earlier on November 9, 2016, the 78th anniversary of *Kristallnacht.* Our latest prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, had responded with an obligatory congratulatory phone call. Despite close diplomatic relations between the two countries, reports suggested the conversation hadn't gone especially well. When the arrangement brokered between Turnbull and Barack Obama for the US to take a few thousand of our "unwanted" refugees had come up, Trump allegedly told Turnbull it was "the worst deal ever made" and hung up. Our restaurant neighbours had read about it and we shared a bittersweet laugh about the absurdity of this new era of politics. I could tell that the sound of Trump's name had set Lotte's mind to work. She must have heard us vocalising our concerns about him in harried tones in recent days, and she and Milo had told me that even in the schoolyard the kids had been winding each other up about the bad guy in charge of America. Now she was joining mental dots and itching to interject with a question, but the grown-ups were laughing loudly, jostling for airspace and her small voice was trampled beneath them. I listened to our neighbours and kept an eye on her, watching her focus into the middle-distance.

"I want to ask a question," she said, almost out of earshot. The conversation steamed on, a train bouncing along inexorable tracks.

"I have a question to ask," she tried again. Now I pulled the emergency brake.
"Yes, Lotte? What would you like to ask?"

Remnants of laughter from our two tables fell to silence. She looked at her papa with her clear teal eyes and, with a few thoughtful words, disturbed our convivial atmosphere like a rock through a pane of glass.

"Papa, in the old days, did the German people used to be evil?"

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A new shop had opened up on the other side of our street. Its window winked at me as I went past, not a flirty one-eyed come hither, but something wholesome; both eyes dancing together, open and shut, squinting and sparkling in the way some people do here when they wish to make you feel at ease. That simple gesture always makes me smile. It spreads through me the feeling that between all those sheets of history rubbing

between us there might be a kind of salve, made up of a single ingredient. Viviane, a German friend I inherited from Simon years ago, had once observed to me that there is no German word for kindness. There is *Freundlichkeit* or *Nettigkeit,* she explained, but neither expresses the essence of what it means to be kind. This absence was a clue, she was conspicuously suggesting. Whenever a German gave me that double wink I always had the feeling it filled that gap, a compensation for this limitation of their language, and perhaps a gentle challenge to the assumptions of others.

All those shopfront treasures glinting in the November sunlight lured me inside, where I found a woman around my age beside her counter, her pale hair folded into a halo of plaits. She was talking animatedly to a customer who was telling her how captivated she was about all the lovely things in the shop. I began picking up various things; a tin of "miracle fish", a box of matches embossed with a tiger, some hand-knitted cushions that I happened to have too at home; a postcard with the inscription "*Gänsehaut lügt nie*" (Goosebumps never lie). The proprietor turned her attention to address me in a friendly way. I answered in a jumpy German that belied the three months since we had moved here. She responded with the usual enquiries.

"Why had we moved here? Did I like it in Germany?" I provided my answers, whose veneer I had already honed to a diplomatic sheen.

"My husband is German and we thought it would be an interesting experience to live here for a few years with our children," I replied. "Yes, I quite like it here."

She looked at me squarely, her eyes as transparent as my thoughts, and pressed on.

"But why would you move here from such a beautiful place? Don't you find the weather terrible and the people unfriendly?"

I was already acquainted with this second tier of questioning. I answered with something familiar about it being an adventure, referred to my love of cultural pursuits, to the proximity of the rest of Europe. She didn't seem satisfied.

"You know, my husband has lived here for 20 years and he still doesn't feel at home."

I asked where he was from. “Argentina,” she replied. “Which might be somehow comparable to Australia in terms of the openness of its culture,” she mused.

I nodded and picked up a brass keepsake box with an elephant-shaped clasp that I thought my mother-in-law could add to her pachyderm collection.

“But even so,” the proprietor carried on. “It’s incredible how much he still feels like an outsider here.”

I looked up from the trinkets and considered her words with interest. Her gaze moved straight past me towards the window.

“It’s even more unbelievable, really,” she said, “because he is German.”

She turned her head back to me and held my gaze in a pair of pincers. “His family is German, I mean.”

I froze. Germans living in Argentina. I tried to rearrange my thoughts. I looked at my hand. I saw myself throwing the box through the shopfront, splintering it into a thousand shards of crystal. Instead I composed myself and offered to pay for it. The woman smiled and introduced herself, Friederike.

“But I’m sorry, I don’t take credit cards. Only debit card or cash.”

Germans tend to have a pragmatic relationship with their bank accounts, I had learned. It’s considered normal to spend what one has, no more. A relic of the war, I had heard. The German word for debt is *Schuld.* It’s also the word for guilt. I told Friederike I’d be walking by later on my way home from school with the children. I would come back then and bring her the cash.

Lotte and Milo were reasonably settled into the first class at our local primary school, they were of that size when their school bags seemed to carry them. I quickly peeled them off their backs and stuck them in a corner before they could do any damage. I stayed close to the door with the money ready in my hand. I had planned to make the transaction swift, but the shop held too many temptations for a couple of six-year-olds and Friederike seemed just as captivated by the pair of them. She complimented me on

their grasp of German, marvelled at their chattiness, peppered them with questions they answered while seeming to slip away from me even in the radius of that pocket-sized shop. For a moment things fell quiet. I filled the gap with some chatter but this woman didn't seem to be listening. She was examining the kids intently as though working her way through a series of calculations.

"You know," she said finally. "There is something different about your kids."

My eyes swung over to them to check if they looked like they normally did.

"Something special," she continued.

In German, as in English, the word "special" can signify something positive or negative; the context becomes apparent in the intonation or context. In that moment I had no chance of grasping which.

"Yes," she concluded.

I curled my palm around the banknotes in my fist. I squinted as though to ensure I had correctly understood. My instinct told me what she was about to say, even though I couldn't believe that she would, and with my silent might I willed her not to. She smiled, oblivious.

"Yes, I know what it is. They look …" She paused.

"They look Jewish."

She smiled but I didn't register it as such.

"Excuse me?" was all I could muster.

"They look Jewish," she repeated, looking directly into my eyes.

Was it even possible to say such a thing here? Was it legal? My first urge was to grab my children and flee. Should I call the police? I didn't even know the number. Anyway, what would I say? My mind roiled, then stalled. What would they say?

Another question formed in my head. Wasn't this the moment? The one where I had to decide whether to embrace or denounce why Jewishness, or at least to acknowledge it? It was all very well with my chopped liver in my kitchen, but did I have the courage to do it here, in front of this self-possessed stranger in her pretty shop, where my words held the power to shatter all of that loveliness around her?

I took a breath and tried again to fix my thoughts in a more coherent pattern. This was 2016, not 1936. I was not answerable to this woman. But what about to myself? Didn't I owe it to myself to say, "Yes, I'm Jewish. Yes, I'm here." The fear churned up inside me just as it had in the seconds before I would spring from the diving board as an adolescent; I felt the trembling of the platform, saw the water waiting like a sheet of glass below, both of them contriving to paralyse me; yet I knew that once I was airborne the freedom would be mine. I closed my eyes for a moment, pictured myself taking off, and jumped. In the reverberations I heard the sound of Friederike's laughter.

"Oh, that's just wonderful," she was saying with tears in her eyes. "My husband is Jewish too, and your children remind me so much of his nieces and nephews in Buenos Aires."

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Friederike arrived at our place for *Shabbas* dinner one Friday evening a few weeks later with her favourite nut cake from Dallmayr, a pair of presents for the twins from her shop wrapped up like Italian sweets, and her husband, Claudio. He was holding an old *Siddur* that I had asked her to ask him to bring. I had forgotten to bring a prayer book from Sydney. I chided myself for that now, although I didn't really need one. I knew the words to the Friday night prayers. It was only that I'd thought how lovely it would be to have another Jew beside me. We could stand at the head of the table and lead the others, I thought. Or maybe he'd prefer to do it himself.

The *Siddur*, damp from the cupboard in Buenos Aires where it must have sat for decades, smelled mossy. Claudio laid it gently into my hands. Without looking down I recognised

its size and weight, the texture of its cover, tightly cross-hatched in dark cotton that had begun to fur at its corners. As it left Claudio's hands, they sprung upwards so that his palms faced me in surrender.

"I haven't opened it since my *Bar Mitzvah*," he confessed shyly, stepping backwards. "I don't think I can recite any of the prayers."

I smiled. My heart fell. My family and our new friends assembled behind the chairs around our dining table. Simon and the kids were near me and Claudio, according to his preference, at the other end with his wife. Sustaining this ritual now fell entirely to me. I'd caught two trains across town to the kosher shop to buy kosher chicken livers and egg *Lockshen*, grape juice and *Kiddush* wine, *Sippets*, herrings and pickles from a Russian woman standing on the till while a rabbi with curly *payot* exchanged words with the *Shochet* slicing meat in the kitchen. I had tended the chicken soup until its surface glistened. To her delight, I had called my mother for the recipe for her famous honey roast chicken. On the table were the sterling silver candlesticks she had bought us for our wedding from a dear man in Brooklyn who restores old Judaïca salvaged from eastern Europe only to put it back into the hands of Jews like us.

Friday night dinner had always materialised in the same way as Hollandaise sauce: you were grateful it held together, yet you had no idea how it did. And gosh, it was wonderful. Here I was, suitcases stuffed behind the door to this extemporised living room, my heart heaving with the symbolism of our first *Shabbas* at home in Munich. I consoled myself by conjuring the ghost of a benevolent rabbi.

"*Nu, Lisalé*, with your Bavarian bread, your mouldy prayer book and your *goyishe* husband?" he shrugged. "With that you will make a *Shabbas?*"

Isn't that what Jews have always had to do; make do? Keep the traditions alive with what we can remember, whatever we have to hand, even if it's less than we would wish for and doesn't really fit.

Lucia held the match. With Lotte's hand in hers they struck the box till it lit, holding it to the wicks till the flame licked their fingers. They shook it instead of blowing it out as I'd taught them to do, even though I couldn't explain why. The candles burned, we covered

our eyes with our palms, and together the three of us recited the prayer. Even in liberal households, it's customary for the blessing over the *Shabbas* wine to be recited by the man of the house. He begins, half-speaking, half-singing. At certain points, everybody else chimes in. It's a bit like the school song or a national anthem. Only the diligent know all the words. The rest of us are happy to pick up the chorus. Yet even if we're wobbly we appreciate the feeling of togetherness it confers.

It was up to me now. I opened my mouth. My fingers grabbed at the *Siddur's* humid sheets. I looked down and saw that, logically enough, the text was printed in Hebrew and Spanish. I thought of our visit to Tolèdo with my parents when my brother and I were teenagers. It was there that we had learned about the medieval Spanish Jews who had hidden their *Shabbas* candles by lighting them in cupboards during the Inquisition. I thought of the Italian-American reform rabbi who had married Simon and I at what we loved to call our "Jew-ish" wedding in Venice, who works for much of the year in Calabria helping "Catholics" who've been plaiting loaves on Friday nights for generations, covering their mirrors and tearing their clothes when their loved ones die, without knowing why.

I had to go on. The smell of must rose from the prayer book's pages and caught in my throat. I was afraid if I turned them too quickly they might fall to pieces. I kept flicking, with no real idea where to find what I sought. I gazed up at the expectant faces watching me. Each smiled and nodded at me, a silent chorus of encouragement. I had recited the prayer over the wine at my own *Bat Mitzvah*. I had sung it more times than I could remember. Why was it abandoning me now?

I gripped the open *Siddur* and pressed my other hand into the end of our dining table, the one around which we'd eaten more breakfasts and lunches and dinners than I could remember. *Shabbases* too, with my mum and stepdad, my stepsister and brother, our kids and theirs beside me. The ceiling light illuminated it like a prop on a stage. I inhaled. The others held their breath. I opened my mouth and began somewhere in the middle. Lucia helped me a bit with the chorus, her voice smoothing over the cracks in mine. Milo's lips were moving, trying so sweetly to mouth words he only half-knew. Lotte watched me with her shy eyes. Simon tried to hum the chorus.

Milo put his warm hand on the *Challah* cover my mum had kept for me all these years. He remembered the blessing for the bread. He helped me tear it off in chunks and sprinkle them with salt, pass them around the table. When I brought the chicken soup, Lotte leant over her bowl, pointing to the golden halos glistening on top and asked, “Mama, what are those?”

“They’re rings of love,” I replied. I showed her the scrap of paper with *Buba*’s delicate handwriting.

“Where does it say ‘love’?’” asked Lotte. “There,” I replied, taking her hand in mine and pressing it to her heart.

Chapter Five
Spring 2015

Just over a year earlier at our kitchen table in Sydney, I opened the paper one spring morning to read the news that Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, had made the spontaneous decision to open Germany's eastern borders to refugees fleeing civil war in Syria. In the end over a million people would breach that porous line, many of them Syrian, others from various Middle Eastern, North African and other countries. In those first moments I felt a surge of wonder lifting off the pages of the newspaper where I used to work as a journalist. A German term came to mind, one of a few that had been created for the post-Holocaust era, sandwiching a series of concepts into an infamous compound word. *Wiedergutmachung.* "To make good again".

I moved to the computer at my desk, seeking more context for Merkel's move. After decades of grappling with their inherited role as the perpetrators of the Holocaust, was the idea that Germans, via their leader's magnanimous gesture, could now recast themselves as transformed, genuine in their desire to redeem themselves, with evidence now at the ready?, I wondered. I leaned back on my old swivel chair, whose wooden backrest has a helpful habit of digging into my spine whenever I try to relax. Make. Good. Again. In English those words couldn't become one. Or could they? Without meaning to, and knowing that there was no way the two contexts could in any way be made to relate to each other, my thoughts made the etymological jump to that slogan's cousin. Donald Trump, who was campaigning to be the 45th president of the USA, had trademarked it earlier in the year. "Make. Great. Again." It had not yet been converted into an acronym embroidered onto red caps to be worn across the cortex like the name of a baseball team. Trump's candidacy was still considered by pretty much everyone I knew to be akin to an episode in a reality television show that everybody was watching even though it was embarrassing to admit it. If it was momentarily titillating, it was also surely soon to be forgotten. The alternative seemed so absurd as to be incredible. It would mean that the centre of the western world would have fallen away from the values of tolerance and understanding to embrace narcissism and hatred. I thought of Australia's refugee policy, its deliberate cruelty designed to act as a deterrent. I shuddered.

I considered Merkel's gesture again. Its humanitarian dimension was inarguable. Surely her conviction had been born in the Christian values of compassion expressed in the

name of her party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), I reasoned. I felt a strong urge to trust in her desire to do good. Didn't she embody the possibility that a leader could own a moral compass and be willing to act on it?

Straight lines could not be drawn between past and present, yet it was hard to avoid parallels as I scrolled through news photographs of refugees huddled on eastern European train platforms heading to life in western Europe rather than on their way to be murdered in the death camps euphemistically referred to as "the East". Their circumstances were vastly different, but I couldn't ignore how "right" and "wrong", "us" and "them" were reverberating through time like passengers on those trains. Here was the past walking straight into the present. There were the Germans with their blankets and their home-baked *Bundt* cakes, their thermoses of coffee and their invitations to strangers to stay in their homes overnight.

I thought of the Jewish precept of *Tikkun Olam*; the incumbency on each of us to do what we can to repair the world. That impetus had been threaded through my education as much as the passages of literature, the rows of sums and the pages of history. I pushed my body further against the backrest where it hurt me most. I was flailed by that other Jewish tendency; to answer any question, no matter that it might seem to have been answered, with another. I had arranged my thoughts too neatly. I was missing something and it dug like a blade into all this doing-goodness.

In the early hours I woke up to a murmur hovering next to my ear. I had the urge to stand on the bed and go at it with my pillow or try to crush it with my palm against the wall, but it couldn't be so easily killed off. It buzzed with a question I wished I was at liberty to swat away: "What does it mean for the Jews?"

Four months later, we were back in Germany for an extended visit. Simon's parents had invited us on a family holiday with his sister and her kids over what Germans call *Silvester*, so that when we woke up on New Year's Day 2016 we were in Italy. Over breakfast we tried to get our heavy heads around what had occurred the previous night in Cologne. Hundreds of women had been sexually assaulted by "gangs of Middle Eastern men" in the city centre where thousands of people had been celebrating New Year's Eve. I cut up the kids' fried eggs with one hand and with the other I held my phone, scrolling with my thumb from one report to the next. I tried to visualise how it could have

happened: were the women pulled out of the crowds and taken to alleyways, or had the assaults occurred right where they stood? Where were they now? Nothing I read held answers to those questions. The reports seemed to cluster around a collective concern: who were the men?

The idea that they were refugees, the very men whom Merkel had pulled from civil war to safety, was already in circulation. I gasped at how quickly the double-edged sword could be pulled from its sheath; how in one movement victims could be turned into perpetrators as though the transformation had already been written in. The police chief was being called on to resign. Merkel's name was in the fray. Very few of the men had been apprehended. It was far from clear if any had come into Germany via Merkel's act of "*Wilkommenskultur*", another heavily loaded term that could cut both ways) yet the question hung in the air like a noose. The suspension of border controls that had allowed the migration to flow unimpeded had until the previous day looked like magnanimity. Now it was easy to see how it could be weaponised, recast as an invitation to invasion. I tried to think rationally. There would surely be an investigation. There would be diligent attempts to separate fact from fear. Yet no matter whether the perpetrators turned out to be asylum seekers or refugees or residents, the damage seemed as good as done.

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Winter 2017

Eighteen months later, across the Atlantic, the rumblings of race-baiting and revisionism had begun to do their dirty work. Donald Trump was still the American President. Truth, which until then I had believed in a democracy was more or less to be trusted, had shown itself to be a precarious thing. The term "alternative facts" had been introduced into the vernacular. On this side of the pond, the differentiations between "us" and "them" seemed stark. The far-right Alternative for Deutschland party might have metastasised in the ashes of Merkel's good intentions, but its aegis was surely limited; its ascendancy appeared to be reassuringly capped. Democracy might be crumbling elsewhere, but here it was still sure to hold strong. As though it meant to emphasise this paradigm that I clung to, six months after we'd moved to Munich the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* published its weekly edition with a cover image characterising Donald Trump's presidency. The illustration depicted him, faceless save for his characteristically opened

mouth, clutching the Statue of Liberty's severed head aloft in his right hand as a trophy. In his left, he wielded a bloody machete. The wound spouted blood that dripped red blotches, stark against the white floor. The magazine had been lying around that week on the kitchen bench, by the sofa, beside our bed, in any of the places we might steal a few moments to read it. The kids must have noticed but it wasn't until a few weeks later that Lotte picked it up, looked up at me with her well of concern painted onto her face and asked, "Mama, why is this statue bleeding?"

I began to explain the principles of freedom, justice and tolerance as aptly as I could for a six-year-old's enquiring mind. Trump had issued his immigration restrictions, banning visitors and residents from six Islamic countries from entering the US. I told her about it and explained why Simon and I disagreed. I mentioned Milo's friend Akbar, the Sudanese boy at their after-school care centre. I said that now he wouldn't be allowed to travel to America or live there.

"But why?" she responded.

"Only because he has a different religion and he looks different and that makes some people afraid of him and his family," I replied.

"But what religion is he?"

"He's Muslim," I replied.

"You know how people from different religious or cultures sometimes look different or dress differently to other people", I began to explain, "You know how Jewish men and boys wear *Kippahs*, or Muslim ladies and girls wear scarves over their hair and sometimes cloaks over their whole bodies." Her eyes widened, and she smiled with the contentment that familiarity can bring.

"Oh, you mean like Céline's mum at school?"

"Yes, exactly," I replied.

“But why would someone be so horrible to them just because of that?” she remarked with the impeccable logic of a child.

“No reason,” I replied. “Just because they’re different and some people think that means they’re dangerous.”

The following day I promised to pick up the kids directly from school. On the few occasions when I had managed to get there in time, Céline’s mum had always been waiting with her younger child in a stroller, looking from under her eyelids at the doors, wearing a *hijab* over her hair and chest. Apart from Celine’s, Akbar’s and a handful of other families, virtually all of the kids at the school were what racists would call “white”. After having lived most of my life in multicultural Sydney I was struck by this homogeneity early on and had commented to another mother with mild bemusement that the school wasn’t exactly *Multikulti*.

“*Doch*,” she replied, using that oft-invoked German word that has no pithy English equivalent and translates roughly to “It is *so*”, invariably followed by “and here’s why”.

“Our school is very multicultural,” she countered. I raised an eyebrow. “We have Spanish, Swedes, Dutch, Italians, French …”

“But they’re all white Europeans,” I responded. She returned my smile with a frown, as though I was missing something.

Lotte and Milo sprang through the doors, jumping with delight and rushed over to embrace me. As they did so, Lotte spotted her friend Céline over my shoulder and waved goodbye to her, then pushed her body backwards, grabbed my hand and with her other arm outstretched like she wanted me to join her in a *Hora*, she pointed to Céline and her mum and proclaimed,

“Look Mama, they’re Muslims!”

I nodded and tried to shush her, but she thought I hadn’t heard. Her face was a picture of delight. I knew she was trying to show me that she had reflected on our discussion. I knew what she wanted to say was, “Look, Mama, there’s my school friend and her mum

and they're Muslims, that's my classmate and she and her family are exactly like us, isn't it wonderful?" But what she said, even louder this time, was:

"Mama, look, they're *Muslims.*"

I glanced over to Céline's mum. She seemed occupied with her toddler. Perhaps she hadn't heard. If she had, how could I explain? What would she think if she knew we were Jews and my daughter had pointed her out with her children as Muslims? Perhaps she would understand Lotte's intentions and laugh it off. But what if she interpreted it differently? I took hold of my kids' hands and suggested we race each other to the swimming pool. As my breath caught in my throat, I cast my mind back 80 years and imagined a similar scene. A small girl outside a school in Munich as she pointed and exclaimed, perhaps with another inflection, "Look Mama, they're Jews!"

Chapter Six
Spring 2017, Munich

On Tuesday afternoons I often visit our local weekly famers' market in the square before the big Catholic church. The stallholders sell their produce with the same Bavarian patois they must use to grow it.

"*Grüß Gott*" they offer in greeting and take their time, impervious to the snaking queues, fixed only on the exchange at hand.

After each selection, they enquire politely, "*Noch einen wunsch*?"

When the transaction is over, they'll entreat you to enjoy a pleasant afternoon. If you reply in kind, they will wish you another good thing, signalling your release. It's like taking part in a historic dance. Every 15 minutes the old bells ring on the square and remind me that I've lingered too long.

One Tuesday in March, I finished my shopping, heard the bells clang, looked at the clock and calculated that I wouldn't have much time to make dinner. I turned back to the only stall in the market that sells cooked food. There are two options: pale Bratwurst roasted over a portable barbecue, with or without bread. It occurred to me that I could buy some for the kids and stave off their appetite for a while. So I took four sausages wrapped in greaseproof paper, without bread, and tucked them into my basket next to the radishes and field salad, the local *Saibling* and fresh dill, the handmade *Spätzle* and the eggs with their feathers still attached.

I walked home along G-strasse, and to my surprise when I passed the synagogue the great doors were open. A dark-haired woman my age was helping elderly ladies and gentlemen out of a pair of taxis and up the dozen stairs to the first floor. I darted over, panting like a dog and spewed a string of rationales: I was Jewish and lived nearby and had walked past many times but I hadn't yet made it to a service and I wondered, would she please let me in? She laughed warmly and pointed up the stairs.

"Ask for Miriam."

I stepped inside. She turned to make sure her charges were secure against the balustrades and then she pulled the front doors closed, in that movement shrinking the grand entranceway to an airless antechamber. I gazed down to the end of my arms and saw my shopping baskets hanging off them like evidence. The stench of the sausages, which it now occurred to me were almost certainly pork, rose to my nostrils and turned my cheeks to scarlet. I dropped the shopping firmly into the corner nearest the exit and bounded up the stairs into a corridor dulled by old carpet. Through two doors on the right, I spied the rooms behind those galleried windows that I had squinted up to so often from the street. I could see from the cornices that they would once have been three formal rooms with interconnecting doors. Now it was a single expansive chamber with a raised *Bimah* at one end and a buffet set with gold-rimmed china cups and saucers at the other. In between were a dozen café tables set up in parallel rows, covered with synthetic blue cloths and garnished with tulips in slender vases.

I found Miriam at the end of the hall, helping the new arrivals with their coats. She took in my patter without interruption, nodding with her chin, gleaning my froth. Her cerulean eyes darted sideways to note the minutiae of the thickening crowd around us who were now hanging their own coats with shaky fingers.

“They’re survivors,” she confirmed. “They meet here on Tuesday afternoons for *Kaffee und Kuchen,* to socialise with each other and we usually prepare some activities for them. We call it *Café Zelig.*”

An ancient figure propped up on a walking frame came at us down the corridor like a tortoise on wheels.

“She’s 93,” said Miriam, “She knows exactly what’s going on.”

I found out later that her name was Helga Verleger, and when I googled her I found the précis of her wartime experience on the website *Die Quelle Sprechen* (the Sources Speak).

> Born 1925 in Berlin; In September 1942 deportation of the three-member family to Estonia Raziku (Raasiku), from there onward transport to the Jäggala camp; Murder of the mother in Kalevi-Liiva; forced labor in Reval

(today Tallinn) on the shipyard for Philipp Holzmann AG; Murder of the father in Dorpat (today Tartu); Until 1944 forced labor in several camps; In summer 1944 taken to the Stutthof concentration camp near Gdansk; Track works for the Deutsche Reichsbahn in the then West Prussian Bromberg (Polish: Bydgoszcz); Return transport to the German Reich in January 1945. Escape. Has lived in Munich since 1970.

Miriam introduced me to her father, also a survivor. He kissed her on both cheeks and offered me a watery smile on his way to the cloakroom. The arrivals seemed to be settled now. Miriam pulled at a strand of her caramel frizz and showered me with questions: I was Jewish? Australian, right? Why was I in Germany? What was I writing about again? Interesting. We could do with some more volunteers to help set up, serve coffee and cake, above all to talk to the old people. Would I be interested?

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The following Tuesday was *Purim*. I sent a message to Miriam asking whether I could come along and help. She replied warmly, asking me to meet her and the others instead at Café Einstein. They were expecting a lot more guests than usual this week. I knew where to go. We had strolled past early one evening on a little sightseeing jaunt with Simon's parents. My father-in-law had pointed out Café Einstein directly across the square from the *Ohel Jakob* Synagogue, beneath the offices of the Jewish Board of Deputies. "It's the only kosher restaurant in Munich," he had told me, his eyebrows inviting my response. I tried to match his enthusiasm. My relationship with kosher food was not all that friendly. I tried to bolster my thoughts by reflecting that there was a Jewish restaurant in the centre of this city, albeit one that had to be entered via security. Through the restaurant's thick windows I peered into a function-sized room that housed a handful of diners.

I took the tram over that Tuesday afternoon and managed to arrive early. A young Israeli followed me inside and asked me to identify myself. I pulled out my dark blue Australian passport. He studied it, appraised me, waved me in. In the stone foyer, dressed in a bright taffeta dress, was the dark-haired woman I had seen last Tuesday helping the survivors up the stairs.

“Hello!” She waved vigorously. “How are you? We met last week. I’m Fabiana. Well, actually today I’m Queen Esther.”
Jewish people dress up on *Purim*, just as everybody else does in Germany for *Fasching*. I wouldn’t be surprised if there was a historical connection. I hadn’t dressed up in a *Purim* costume since primary school.

The restaurant staff were wheeling out trolleys loaded with platters of appetisers covered in cling-wrap, pots of milk and sugar, and *Hamantaschen*, the sweet biscuits filled with mashed dates or jam that we eat at *Purim* to symbolise Haman’s ears. The biblical story is that Haman wanted to kill all the Jews, starting with Mordechai, but his plan was scuppered when Mordechai and Esther, who somehow, as a Jew, had become Queen of Persia, outmanoeuvred him. There are competing versions as to why the biscuits are sweet when Haman was evil. The story that stayed with me was that Haman’s ears were cut off before he was executed on the gallows he had built for Mordechai and we eat them in memory of this sweet revenge. There are more benevolent interpretations, such as that their sugariness derives from the Jews’ tendency to recast episodes of evil into sweeter incarnations, thousands of years later.

There were three long tables, each set for 20, a podium prepped for a speech, and a portable keyboard and microphone where a Russian performer with a Hollywood smile was warming up. Some of the survivors had arrived early and had taken up residence between fancy dress items on a banquette.

“Take their coats,” instructed a social worker from upstairs, gesturing in my direction.

I tiptoed over and entreated them in my finest formal German. No response. I clasped my hands together and tried to make the intonations sound like the Yiddish I had grown up hearing my mother and grandmother, my aunt and my uncle speak to each other. Nothing. I tried again, smiling warmly and nodding as though this might finally impute my trustworthiness. Each fixed their gaze past me. I pointed to the cloakroom at the far end of the room, next to the bathrooms.

“I’ll just hang them up over there,” I tried.

Their eyes and hands held firm.

The room filled up, the appointed time arrived and at last they were allowed to sit at the tables. Their bodies slowed them but their faces showed the urgency of finding the right spot. A couple of women linked arms like in photos from the 1930s, when their cheekbones had been sharper, their nylons silkier and their lips painted into bows. I watched another reserve the seat beside her with her handbag and coat. A few of the men arrived. I noticed one of them, in a flak jacket and cap, scan the room and shuffle to a seat next to another, who was dressed in a double-breasted suit and peaked woollen hat. He turned and winked at Fabiana and I.

About an hour in, by which time the plates of *Hamantaschen* had disappeared, Charlotte Knobloch arrived. There was a respectful pause as she strode in with her honey brown bobbed hair, tanned complexion, fuchsia suit and her pair of young bodyguards.

“Merkel’s boys always look like that too,” Fabiana whispered. “These old women aren’t stupid.”

We were quickly shushed. Knobloch took her place at the podium and gave a prepared speech. I knew she was the president of the Jewish community of Munich and Upper Bavaria, an advocate for Jewish life in Germany who’d had to fend off plenty of flak and fight hard. I’d read that she had survived the Holocaust disguised as a Catholic child in middle Franconia. I searched her face for the six-year-old child who had witnessed the original *Ohel Jakob* Synagogue where she had prayed with her family each week being set alight by the Nazis on 9 November 1938, its arches crumbling, its windows shattering on the “Night of Broken Glass”, its Torah scrolls turning to dust.

I knew that, if not for her, none of us would be in this kosher restaurant in the heart of Munich tapping our feet to *Bei Mir Bist Du Shayn*, nor would there exist the central Jewish offices and primary school in the same building or the Jewish Museum opposite, and certainly not the synagogue standing firm across the courtyard with its foundations of stone and its doors of steel, this stand-in for the community exterminated by the Nazis. What did she feel from behind that well-preserved mask, I wondered, as she read to that handful of survivors of that catastrophe, mostly from elsewhere, who gathered around her, a decimated flock?

After her speech, I watched her walk behind a few of the seated guests. She greeted each one effusively by shaking their hands over their shoulders, so that they wouldn't have to turn their faces away from the musician, I supposed, who was already making their shoulders sway, their mouths move and their eyes water.

Fabiana introduced me to Henry Rotmensch, a favourite of hers. I saw in his eyes that the appreciation was mutual. Rotmensch, survivor of Buchenwald, born in Poland, 91 years old, greeted me by reaching out his arm to pull me in by my hand, on which he planted a proper smooch, lips puckered and wet to ensure it would safely land. I leaned in and kissed his jowly cheek. He squeezed my hand tighter. I watched as his irises dilated and his face opened into the contented smile of a baby after warm milk. He charmed us like a pair of jewellery box ballerinas who could be wound up with just a few turns of a spring. With one hand still holding mine, he reached out the other to clasp Fabiana's. I saw her eyes turn misty and felt mine do the same. I looked at him and wondered which of us was looking after whom.

What could I give him, other than my ear, a kiss, my hand to hold? I tried speaking to him in a few words of Yiddish that I remembered. His pale eyes widened so that he could appraise me for a second time. He pushed his chair out from the table, swayed his torso backwards as he pulled a handkerchief out of his breast pocket and brought it to his cheeks. I hastily switched back to German. I admired his woollen peaked cap and the gold buttons on his jacket with its natty pocket square. He told me how he used to run a clothing shop, how even now his wardrobes were full of dozens of jackets and ties and shirts and trousers in a rainbow of colours. His wife's clothes were still there too, he said, the cupboards were full of them, even though she had died ten years earlier.

"You should see the dresses," he insisted, wagging his forefinger to emphasise his pride. "Beautiful dresses, very high quality."

His eyes grew moist again in the corners. Just then, as I later learned is his habit in moments he finds too tender or dry, he began to sing a Yiddish melody. I laid my hand on his shoulder and he covered it with his own.

The website *Die Quellen Sprechen* is produced by Bavarian Radio. Herr Rotmensch is there too, along with other survivors, each with a photograph, a sound recording and a synopsis. Later that afternoon at our apartment, I looked him up. This was his story:

> Henry Rotmensch: Born in Polish Bedzin in 1925; In 1939 he was captured by the SS in Sosnowitz and transferred to the Johannesdorf camp (Upper Silesia). Forced labor for the Reichsautobahn Oppeln-Katowitz and as a locomotive leader; 1940 in the working camp at Markstädt near Breslau, compulsory work as a carpenter in the construction of a Krupp factory; 1943 in the concentration camp outside Fünfteichen and concentration camp GrossRosen; 1944 Deportation to concentration camp Buchenwald, accommodation in the "gypsy block" (Block 47); From there transport to Spaichingen (outside camp of Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp); On April 18, 1945, evacuation of the camp; Death march towards the Tyrol; At Bad Wurzach liberation by the French Army. Has lived in Munich since 1945.

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A few weeks later, back in the usual location near our apartment, it was Passover. Herr Rotmensch was about to celebrate his 92nd birthday. I asked him what he had planned.

“They have asked me to go to Buchenwald,” he replied, his watery blue eyes fixed over my shoulder while I contemplated who “they” might be and tried to draw his gaze back towards mine.

“Really? On your birthday? Do you want to go?” I asked.

“I’ve been there twice,” he replied as though that was an answer in itself.

I tried to formulate a response, but it was redundant. He had paused only to draw breath.

“The first time, well, I wasn’t there as a guest,” he quipped with a grimace that disappeared so quickly I barely caught it. “Then I was invited to go back a few years ago, and I did. Now, they asked me again.”

He inhaled. “So I’ll go *again?”* That final phrase was uttered as a question, with a lilting upward inflection that echoed the shrugging movements of his shoulders and his eyebrows as though all of them were connected. The word that hung unspoken in the air between us was the Yiddish “*Nu*?”, that small but expansive term used liberally by Jews to convey any number of implied questions from the pedestrian: “*So*?” or “What’s been going on?” to “Your daughter’s not married *already*?” or “Your son’s *still* going out with the *Shiksa*?” and often, like now, simply: “What can you do?”

“But,” I began again, “how do you feel about going? Won’t it be emotional? Too emotional?”

Now he held my gaze directly.

“The first time,” he explained, “I cried a lot. He drew breath and his eyes widened as though there was a connection between them. “The second time, I cried a bit less.”

“And this time?” I prompted dutifully.

“This time, I won’t cry.” He leaned on his walking stick, curled his fingers around its handle and leveraged himself off it so that he could get his face closer to mine, so close I could feel his breath in my face.

“I’ve cried all the tears.” His eyes were unblinking. “There aren’t any more.”

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Back in Café Einstein at *Purim* I watched the compact, balding man in the beige peaked hat and flak jacket leaning with one elbow on the table, the other pivoting on his left knee as he made what appeared to be a strident argument to an audience of Herr Rotmensch and a couple of other men. Fabiana noticed my gaze and came over.

“That’s Natan,” she explained. “He’s very political, has very strong views. He has just made a film about his life. You should see it.”

Natan, I discovered within moments of meeting him, is a man of conviction. He grew up poor and tough. He learned to grind axes at the age of 12 in the Lodz ghetto. Later, at Café Zelig, he showed me photographs from his imprisonment there. His eyes glared out of sunken cheeks like coals from a just-extinguished fire. He told me proudly that he speaks Polish, Russian, German, Yiddish, Hebrew and English and insisted that like everybody else I call him Natan instead of Herr Grossmann. Such a man has no need for formalities; they seemed in his radius to be no more than the cladding of a society that isn't civilised at all. All those languages he could speak seemed to me secondary to his words which, I learned over the weeks and months that followed, need no prompt to begin. They shot out of his mouth, one after the other, as though they were being churned from a crank.

If somebody interrupted him, he would repeat himself, once, twice, thrice, ever louder. If that failed, he would stop, turn his torso and his eyes of coal towards the offender and without altering his tone, rhetorically demand:

"Would you like to finish this story?"

Even Herr Rotmensch, Natan's dear friend who must have heard his stories more times than he could remember, daren't disobey, although at times I heard him attempt a diverting song in Yiddish.

From The Sources Speak:

> Natan Grossmann: Born in 1927 as the son of a shoemaker in the Polish village of Zgierz near Lodz; 1940 forced into the ghetto Lodz (Litzmannstadt) forcibly resettled; 1942 deportation of his brother, murder of his father, starvation of his mother; August 1944 liquidation of the ghetto, transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau, from there to the concentration camp outside Vechelde deported to forced labor in a metal factory; March 1945 Death march to Ludwigslust, liberated there on 2 May by US troops. Has been living in Munich since 1961.

Natan's themes were compelling: his time in the camps, his murdered brother and parents, his impoverished childhood and ergo his crusade to enlighten people that most

Polish Jews were dirt poor, living in *Shtetls* and, long before the war, regarded with outright contempt. They were very unlike the *mitteleuropa* moneyed, educated, cultivated, assimilated Jews, he wanted to emphasise. Chief among his resentments is the prejudice that Jews are generally wealthy, with its stuck-on insinuation that they are capitalists. His socialist sentiments were sewn into his words and his demeanour as much as his clothing. He insisted with clockwork regularity that it was only the Soviets, of all the wartime European nations, who were ever friends to the Jews. That Auschwitz was liberated by the Russians and not the Americans was a favoured theme.

Amid these steady dissertations I heard digressions and witnessed small moments of tenderness. His sense of humour emerged like the nose of a badger, as black as his eyes. From that first meeting at *Purim* I pictured him as the adolescent he should have been had he not been robbed of his childhood and family; the kind that likes to throw oil on the fire and watch what happens.

A lady with pale blonde hair, svelte and with a doll's transparent eyes, arrived. I watched her come in, her head, her body and arms making jerky movements as though they had just been attached to each other. I approached her with the sum of what I hoped I had learned in the last few hours. I stood close enough to help, but not so close that I might alarm her. I waited until I sensed she felt more at ease. Only then did I offer her my hand. She allowed me to lead her gently, my arm interlocking with hers, to a seat. I'd seen eyes like hers before, in the faces of my stepfather's elderly patients, most of them dementia sufferers. I introduced myself to her and she replied in impeccable German. I began asking her questions, but she didn't seem to hear them. She smiled and nodded vaguely, sat down then looked up at me in alarm as though she had only in that moment, for the first time, seen me. I opened my mouth to reassure her. She pursed her lips, her hands clasping her handbag, then without any prompting she thrummed her forefinger on her chest and said,

"Auschwitz." My mouth was still open.

"You know Auschwitz?"

I nodded. My nerves biting the tip of my tongue, I kept nodding, then blurted,

“Are you from here? Are you German?”

Her pretty face tilted like a blade turned sideways. She widened her eyes so that her irises jumped out like marbles, streaks of yellow flashing in blue spheres.

“German!” she exclaimed. “I’m not German.” Her face showed disgust. “I’m Jewish.”
Chapter Seven

The following Tuesday Café Zelig was in G-strasse again. Nobody had assigned me a particular task. There seemed to be no expectations other than that I should find the role that suited me best and that helped the survivors the most. After Purim and a few more Tuesdays in G-Strasse, I understood that my part was the one I yearned for most: to talk to and, above all, to listen to the survivors.

In the “café” I introduced myself to one, Herr Wagner. He told me he was 91, a figure that was difficult to equate with his person. He wore an immaculate cream linen suit whose thick fibres caught the autumn light. His ample grey hair must have been groomed with a tortoiseshell comb. His shirt was striped in sky blue and white, a match to his eyes, which looked expensive, a pair of topazes in vitrines. We began by speaking German, but he noted my accent and switched to excellent English, apart from what he called “a few lost words”. My eyes kept falling to his left hand. He observed that too, and lifted my eyes up with his own.

“Labour camp,” he told me. ’42-’45. I was 18 years old, I made munitions.” A machine had taken off half of his left forefinger, he explained.

“How long have you been here?” he asked me.

“Six months or so,” I replied.

He scanned the room with a calculated expression.

“You will get used to it,” he offered, turning back to me. “But honestly it takes years. I hated the Germans at the beginning, but eventually I got used to them.”

I smiled, but he didn’t.

“I am friendly to everyone. Everyone knows I am Jewish. My neighbours, my colleagues where I worked for decades.”

“What kind of work was it?” I enquired.

“I was the manager of an Italian restaurant,” he replied.

It was easy to imagine him in such a role, the maitre’d I supposed, easily mistaken for a gentleman of Verona with his coiffure and bespoke suit.

“I don’t keep it a secret. It’s no problem. But I keep my friends in the community.”

He continued talking without any special need of me, anticipating my unasked questions.

“I have been married twice.” He swivelled to his left and with a slight inclination of his head, pointed out his ex-wife, a raven-haired, wistful-looking beauty sitting almost beside him at the next table. He had remarried 20 years ago.

“She is alive, but she is not here,” he said. “She is sick. Lots of people are sick, blind, can’t walk.”

He lowered his eyes slightly. “My friends are more or less my own age. That’s what happens.”

He didn’t drop the name of the camp he was in and when I enquired he turned circumspect. It was “a famous one, here in Germany,” he offered and his gaze signalled that part of the conversation was now closed. I switched tack and mused about his impressive grasp of English. He surprised me by responding that he had lived in Australia, in the Melbourne suburb of Caulfield, where my father grew up and my relatives on his side of the family have lived for the last four generations.

“I lived there for eight years in the 1950s. It was nice,” he said lightly, “But I felt like a foreigner.”

He came to visit his brother in Munich in 1958, for three months in theory, then fell in love, married.

“The usual story,” he shrugged.

I found out later that Herr Wagner’s presence intimidated some of the other survivors. That they didn’t feel comfortable expressing their opinions when he was around. Watching them made me think of how in every human or animal setting, no matter its nature or shape, there is a pecking order according to which everybody senses their place.

Another survivor, Herr Wolf, had heard us conversing in English and came over.

“I’m a real American,” he told me proudly. “I have a passport.” I recognised the contours of his Polish accent in English. “I’m not German,” he continued. “I’m American.”

“What are you doing here?” I asked politely.

“Ah,” he replied. “I’ve been here for 45 years.”

I tilted my head and raised my eyebrow at him.

“I came back because of my wife,” he shrugged. “She was Austrian, Viennese. She survived in Shanghai for 12 years with her parents, then she came back here to Munich. I met her, we fell in love. I came back here for a blonde, blue-eyed woman.” He pointed his index finger at me. “A blonde, blue-eyed, Jewish woman!”

The same finger, still pointed, moved down and began stabbing at his phone. He tapped on a photo in his camera roll. An auburn-haired rose smiled back at me.

“She’s not here anymore. She died.” His dark eyes hardened behind his horn-rimmed glasses.

“And how is it, living here?’ I asked him.

“Living here is fine,” he replied with a downward turn of his mouth. “It’s a free country.

It's a democracy. I'm Jewish. Nobody can tell me I can't be Jewish. I don't hide it."

"And your friends?" I enquired. "Do you have German friends?"

He shrugged. His index finger lifted again.

"Maybe one."

"You've lived here for 45 years and you have one German friend?" I replied, my eyes making circles of disbelief.

"Business acquaintances, yes," he said with no particular concern. "But friends, maybe only one."

He eyed me intently. "My family, my friends are all Jewish."

He turned to me. "And you, are you Jewish?"

"Yes," I replied. My face coloured.

"And what are you doing here?" he wanted to know, his eyes still piercing mine.

"Well, there are a few reasons … my husband is German."

"German? Is he Jewish-German or German?"

"He's German. He's not Jewish."

He pulled a face. "Well, that's your problem."

I spluttered out a kind of laugh.

"Well, I'm not saying it's a problem. I'm saying it's your problem," he continued.

"Anyway," His eyes moved to the door. "It's not my problem." He looked back at me briefly.

“I’m leaving now,” he told me. “Goodbye.” He turned and walked into the corridor.

I stuck my head in to watch him leave, his comment still ringing in my ears, and heard a curious sound approaching from the kitchen. The doll-eyed lady from *Purim* was walking towards me, slim in a pale blue skirt suit and silk stockings. She was carrying a piece of fluttering alfoil in her hands. I greeted her. She smiled distantly and I watched her make her unsteady way to the buffet, still holding the foil aloft. In one quick movement she smothered a slice of cheesecake and slipped it into her handbag.

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Early Summer 2017

Café Zelig was so close to home it wasn’t even worth getting on my bicycle. Anyway, I preferred the walk. I needed those few minutes to empty my mind of the detritus of daily life and to contemplate the privilege that lay in the handful of hours ahead. As I took those few steps each week, I looked to the sky and asked the God I didn’t believe in if She could keep these living treasures alive a little longer. As I pushed the buzzer to the great wooden door and was buzzed in each Tuesday, I bounded up the stairs, my face frozen in concern until Fabiana’s expression told me that for now, all was well.

One Tuesday afternoon a few weeks later, there was a particular hubbub in the café. A journalist from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ*), one of Germany’s most consumed broadsheets, was coming to visit. Was everybody happy to be interviewed? Did anyone not wish to have their photograph taken? Miriam asked. Nobody demurred. The Russian musician from *Purim* at Café Einstein was back with her smile and her songfest of Hebrew and Yiddish favourites to liven up the atmosphere. When the journalist arrived an hour after everybody else he was forced to grin and nod for half an hour, his long legs crossed over one another, his hand diving habitually into his sandy hair as if to rearrange his thoughts.

As everybody was leaving, I introduced myself to him at the door to the café.

“It’s surprising,” he said, having done the rounds of most of the room. “Some of them, even those who sit together at the same table each week, have never heard each other’s stories.”

It was true. Some had survived as babies or children who had been rescued or hidden by so-called righteous gentiles, and so they had no memories of their murdered parents or the circumstances of their lives, their suffering and their deaths. Others had memories of which they did not always care to speak. With the exception of Natan, Herr Rotmensch and a handful of others, most of the survivors preferred to talk amongst themselves, of other things. I had heard some of them discussing stories they had heard from friends of Jews being harassed in rural Bavarian towns. Others assessed the political situation in America, with varying degrees of support and concern. One Tuesday Natan had come in shaking after his train journey. The Auschwitz tattoo on his arm was hidden under the sleeve of his shirt. A young man had taken the seat opposite him, wearing a t-shirt decorated with a swastika.

“Most of them come here just to be together,” I told the journalist. “They look forward to it all week. I think they feel more at home here than they do anywhere else.”

A week later, the photographer came.

On the first Saturday in June, Simon and I hosted a dinner party, one of our first in Munich. We sat on the sofa drinking a late night glass of grappa and contemplating the pleasures of good food and wine, new friends and the beginnings of a richness of life in Germany taking shape. To the oft-asked question, “Have you arrived?”, I could now say with only a modicum of hesitancy; yes, more or less. Even apart from our dear friends, by now I had encountered at least as many exceptions to the curmudgeonly *Münchner* so easily to be found on the city’s streets: those who held doors open, those who smiled warmly, those who hesitated, even those who apologised.

My phone, which I’d left in the hallway, let out a sharp ping. It was Friederike.

“You’re in the newspaper,” she had written.

She answered my confusion on the next line. “Where is Café Zelig?”

I rummaged through that long weekend's *SZ,* which lay unopened on an armchair and found the article. On the back page of the culture section, entitled *"If I Don't Talk, I'll Go Crazy"* (using the Yiddish word *Meschugge*) was the long-awaited story. The headline was a direct quote from Natan, who had described to the journalist how he had kept silent for 60 years until he visited the Holocaust memorial and museum *Yad Vashem* in Jerusalem, where he had crossed paths with a survivor whom he believed had been murdered. After that he had begun to speak. Since then he hadn't been able to stop.

PART TWO

Chapter Eight
Sydney Jewish Museum, early
2012

The security guard asked me to switch off my phone. On the way to the cafeteria and the administration offices were the exhibits. I tried not to linger on the striped indigo and grey garb hanging in a vitrine on the left. I clenched my jaw to dull the sound of the survivors' testimonies playing on a loop to nobody on a screen. How must it be to greet these relics on the way to the office? Did they wreak their grim work each day, I wondered, or did familiarity diminish their power?

Professor Konrad Kwiet leapt from his seat to greet me with warm hands. He wore a grey beard clipped around his jaw in a way that left his chin clean-shaven. Scholarship seemed to be stuffed into every part of him. I thought of the set of Britannicas in their leather jackets that had occupied a double-decker shelf in my father's study in the front room that had been my childhood bedroom before my parents renovated and I moved upstairs. By the time I was 20, the old sofa bed had been moved in. My mum and I had taken it in turns to sit or sleep on it while my dad's spirit twinkled even as he lay dying in a hired hospital bed.

Kwiet was about the same age he would have been, I guessed, but his wrapping belied a sterner core. It appeared in steely blades in his brown eyes and could be heard in his impatience for me to know that in my rosy ideas of reconciliation I was much mistaken.

“Coffee?” he asked rhetorically. I nodded. He ordered two cappuccinos and began. His summation of post-Holocaust German-Jewish history was hewn into sentences laced with misgivings, the two parts hammered together with an old anvil.

“In 1945,” he began, “There were about 15,000 Jews in total. There were those who were liberated in Germany and those who returned from hiding places. Twenty to 25,000 including mixed marriages. Fifteen hundred in East Germany.” With each number, he prodded the air between us with his forefinger and thumb pressed together.

“Post-war, they formed very secularised Jewish communities. But there was no Jewish life as such. Over the next forty years the Jewish population in Germany grew to no more than 40,000.”

He paused to register I had grasped his statistics, then pulled the plug.

“That Jewish community was living ‘on packed suitcases’.” His eyes dipped to my pen scratching into my notebook. He jabbed his chin as though to ensure they penetrated the page.

“Ready to leave at any moment. Why were they there?” His eyes turned cloudy in answer to his own question. “Because they had nowhere else to go.”

“Then, in the 50s and 60s, other groups started moving to Germany. Émigrés coming back from Israel. Health-wise, climate-wise, because they remembered good times, they went back with their children who had been born elsewhere. A few came back from the US. A handful from Australia. A tiny group of 20 to 25,000 dispersed through the main cities formed an invisible Jewish population.”

“Invisible,” he repeated. He took a sip of coffee and fired off more points. “They were hardly present. They were living on suitcases. They had to justify why they came.”

He held my gaze taut, compelling me to keep scribbling without looking down.

“Then in the 60s & 70s, new groups were coming to Berlin, the first were Israelis, then Romanians. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc there was an

enormous influx of Jews, and …" He paused so that the tail of his sentence came out separately, like phlegm after a sneeze. "Semi-Jews." He sniffed.

"At that time there was a big boom," he continued. "The reason they stayed in Germany was that they weren't included in ordinary refugee quotas. There were no quotas applied to Jewish refugees."

After our meeting, I looked up the terms under which these post-Soviet bloc Jews had been allowed into Germany between 1991 and the early 2000s. Their classification was known as *Kontingentfluechtlinge.* "Quota" refugees. With its open-ended conditions, the gesture smacked of institutionalised goodwill, even as it may have been underscored by other motivations. It wasn't hard to see the benefits to German narratives of atonement if Germany was repopulated with Jews. Yet what was most striking for practising Jews was that the provisions of this special class of refugees disregarded Jewish matrilineal laws of descent. Anybody from a former Soviet state who could establish via documentation that they had a Jewish grandparent, whether on their mother's or father's side, was allowed in. Hadn't the Germans known that Judaism is passed down only through the mother? Perhaps there were other considerations, I reasoned. How would it have looked if the Germans, 50 years after the Nuremberg race laws, had started calculating Jewishness? Better for them, I supposed, to let them all in.

But what about for the Jews already there?

The usual visa considerations as to levels of skills or education, language, funds and all the rest had been waived. The result exponentially swelled the numbers of Jews in Germany via a sweeping-in of all kinds of comers, including those with patrilineal Jewish antecedents. Others of indeterminate number, I later heard it insinuated, had come in via papers bought or forged. Kwiet's "semi-Jews" conveyed a distaste that I would come to hear again and again.

"When the German-speaking, German-born Jews withered and died and these foreign Jews came in," Kwiet continued as his coffee cup clanked into its cradle, "there were 10 to 15,000 Jews living in Germany. No-one knows for sure because there is no systematic figure."

He considered me carefully. “These Russians regard themselves as Jews living in Germany. Not as German Jews. Some are not circumcised. Many have intermarried.”

His words punched the air between us.

“They have totally changed the fabric of what you would call ‘German Jewish’,” he said. “It’s a totally pluralistic Jewish community, but by and large Russian. They have their own TV station, their own radio station. They have formed communities not only in big cities but in regional centres. Some don’t want to have anything to do with the Jewish community and they are there for professional, social, economic reasons.”

I swallowed the last gulp of coffee and felt the cold froth slide down my throat and evaporate.

“No-one knows exactly how many there are now. One hundred to 120,000 since 1989/90ish is the official number,” he added.

I tried to digest his summation: Jewish life in Germany was anaemic, a chimera, propped up only by political will and underscored by forgeries concocted by “foreign” “Russians”. This umbrella term, “Russians”, I learned early, is routinely held up over anybody from that region, even if thousands came from Ukraine, Latvia, Crimea, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and elsewhere. Hadn’t many of the Jews who had, centuries earlier, become the “German-speaking, German-born” Jews that Kwiet was referring to, originally been “Russian”?

At the Jewish Film Festival in Sydney that year, my mum, who was born in Kiev in 1946 to Holocaust survivors from Lvov, in what was then Russia, and Mława in central Poland, introduced me briefly to a scholarly acquaintance. She mentioned my research. Her friend was less effusive.

“Why are you writing about them?” she challenged me. “They’re all Russians.”

My protestations yielded pursed lips. Her legs swivelled away from me towards the cinema where a Holocaust film was showing, and she gave me her parting shot.

“Most of them are not even Jews.”

Unofficially, I understood the combined number of Jews living in Germany was a quarter of a million, if you included the tens of thousands unaffiliated to synagogues, including an estimated 15,000 Israelis, most of them secular and living in Berlin. Symbolically, this was significant. It meant that Jews in Germany now numbered close to half of the pre1933 Jewish population of 500-600,000. There was a tangible significance too. Each of the 82 million Germans was much more likely to encounter Jews in real life, rather than only as museum relics. I had long nursed a line of thought that change occurs, at heart, between individuals, preferably living ones. Surely that was enough to shift the landscape, I surmised. Such a ruction could bear fruit, not all of it sour.
Wasn’t a key challenge for Jews living in Germany, as Kwiet himself had just confirmed, that they were “invisible”; that most Germans, by dint of the 50-year virtual vacuum of Jewish life, had no idea who they were, and no material way of finding out?

I offered him my premise gingerly.

“Isn’t it the ultimate up-yours?” I suggested. “A return of the Jews to ‘the land of poets and thinkers’. Do you think the Germans would have had their Enlightenment without them?”

Kwiet considered me blankly. If there’d once been tears in his eyes, all that remained was their salty residue, calcified into a crust. I tried hacking at it with my optimism. I had the impression that my efforts did more injury to myself than they did to him.

“You should read Diana Pinto,” he suggested, mentioning the name of a historian whose controversial thesis chimed with my wish. Kwiet put paid to it with a handful of words.

“By and large German Jewry as it was pre-war is dead,” he replied. “Gone.” He sighed in the manner of someone tired of repeating himself. “The Germans never loved the Jews.”

His eyes slashed mine.

“Where the Germans raised the Jewish question,” he added. “They answered it.”

I wasn't giving up that easily.

"Hasn't Germany changed?" I insisted. "Hasn't it atoned?"

Anyone could see that displayed so convincingly in their museums and memorials. When could we believe in its transformation?

Kwiet said nothing. He leaned back in his chair and folded his arms across his chest. With his dark beams trained on me, I could read the sign: "A leopard doesn't change its spots."
His bearing impelled me to ask of his family.

"I'm a '*Mischlinge*'," he replied, using the Nazis' term that is otherwise usually applied to animals to denote a half-breed or a mongrel.

Kwiet's mother was a German Jew. His father was a German gentile. By virtue of not being Jewish, he saved Kwiet's, his mother's and his four siblings' lives. Until 1944, those in mixed marriages and their "*Mischlinge"* children were relatively safeguarded. Ninety per cent of Jews who survived the Holocaust in Germany did so on that basis. According to the Nazis' rubric, such families could in certain instances be spared, as long as the marriage was intact. At the same time there was considerable pressure for non-Jews to divorce or denounce their Jewish spouses. A sizeable cohort complied.

"After the war," he added wryly, "there was a massive divorce rate."

It was easy to sense what came next. Shortly after the war ended, his parents' marriage dissolved.

"My father left my mother," he remarked bluntly. "He left her for his 19-year-old secretary."

He continued without drawing breath.

"Twenty years later, the secretary left him for a younger man, and he killed himself."

Kwiet never saw his father again, and when he learned that he had died, he was unmoved.

It was probably the wrong moment to mention my German spouse. My words tumbled out, a string of rationales in response to unasked questions. I pointed to the support of our families, whom I assured Kwiet did not confuse universalised connotations about Germans and Jews with the private nuances that occur between two individuals in love. Kwiet remained impassive.

I ploughed on.
My family had welcomed Simon from the outset. They were interested in his background; they wanted to know what he knew about Judaism and the Holocaust (the answer was quite a lot). The fact that I already had two children was at least as noteworthy to Simon's parents as my Jewishness. They approached both with the same spirit of interest.

Had my sentences been quite so fluently formed as that? More likely they had fallen out in clusters. Perhaps I had transmitted my thoughts merely via intent. I had often enough expressed proximate versions to colleagues at work or acquaintances elsewhere baiting me with their curiosity, eager to know if I'd been distanced or disowned by my family *ipso facto* for falling in love with a German. If his grandparents had been Nazis that would have given them even more juice to suck.

I'd replied by telling them what my mum had told me.

"You can't blame a whole country. You can't blame a whole people. You can't," she had said.

Some of my interlocutors seemed disappointed, like animals with their tongues out having to swallow their saliva when their reward is withheld.

In the museum cafeteria, I told Kwiet that Simon and I had twins, a girl and a boy who were almost one. Simon had been speaking German to them since they were born. I spoke to them in English. My mother peppered her endearments in Yiddish, her *Mamaloshen*. We wanted them to be conversant in the languages, both spoken and felt, of the cultures of both of their parents.

Kwiet listened without comment. Added up, my words amounted to a kind of plea. Most likely it was. Among the Jewish friends I had grown up with, most had ancestors from Poland and Russia or Hungary, the former Czechoslovakia or Lithuania. Communal antipathy towards the Nazis could be activated simply by hearing the sound of the German language. The country itself was most often studiously avoided, as was the buying of its cars, the eating of its food, the wearing of its clothes, even the mentioning of its name.

One of my closest childhood friends had German grandparents whom she called *Oma* and *Opa*. For these Jews, Germany could not be understood in such straightforward terms. The German language and culture represented to them not only traumatic reminders of the Holocaust but also filaments of their family histories, a language their grandparents spoke fluently and that was understood, if not spoken by their parents. It seemed to me that this circumstance produced an inherent contradiction, difficult to reconcile.

Now I found myself in a contiguous landscape. I was a Jew who had fallen in love with a German. My children would grow up speaking his language and imbibing his culture, together with my own. Konrad Kwiet was the first Jew I had met who came from a family that was “mixed” between a non-Jewish German and a Jew. I looked to him now for reference and, if I was honest, for reassurance.

I couldn’t read his face immediately. His right eyebrow sat up, and remained there. Otherwise he was immobile. I stopped talking and waited for something to happen. A smile formed on his lips. I exhaled, anticipating a pithy riposte. He rewarded my instincts, but not in the way I had hoped. Those steely blades of his dulled his eyes’ lustre, as he asked me rhetorically,

“And you’re still together?”

Chapter Nine

My mum invited me to watch a play at a local theatre where community productions were staged behind Sydney’s most famous beach. The Bondi Pavilion held its atmosphere

aloft like helium in yesterday's balloon. The colonnade of arches on the promenade promised grandeur but the foyer carried the dank odour of salty feet and fish-fried oil. The Sunday afternoon crowd were here for the show, huddled in colourful packs; blonde, auburn, burgundy, grey. I could smell perfume in their silk blouses and leather jackets. Some of the men seemed wider than they were tall, freshly shaven, effusive. My mum introduced me to a few of the many here that she knew. I made the right gestures and sounds and spotted, at the far end of the room, the mother of a childhood friend.

She came over with her thick Polish syllables, crooning *"Lisalé!"*, as she held my face in her hands and tilted her head to the side to appraise me. Hearing my *Buba*'s diminutive for me made my eyes water. She pulled back, her hands still on my cheeks, then slowly let them drop. In their place she planted purposeful kisses. Ppww. Ppww. They carried the muddled scent of memory: early morning piano practice in the front room, a red dressing gown, black jam and cottage cheese on dark bread, a white Holden Kingswood with its bench seat and five or six of us squealing with delight as we slid from one end to the other on the way to the primary school where we learned to read from right to left as well as from left to right.

At my mother's prompting, I summarised the research I had just begun. My words limped between us. I saw how they dulled her irises before the shutters fell down. I was already fluent in those lines of scepticism. They set off a recurring wish that I was writing about something easier to stomach.

The bells came to my rescue and we turned to join the squeeze towards the doors. The theatre was full. The play was *Address Unknown*, a compact two-hander based on a novella written by the American author Kathrine Taylor in 1938. Its plot rests on the correspondence between two German men: one Jewish, living in New York, the other gentile, having returned to Munich. Their decades-long friendship plays out in their letters, tracing the trajectory of shared experience and deep affection through to distrust and betrayal. But instead of the Jew following his destiny towards slaughter, he ingeniously entraps his former friend, using his letters as weapons. Each missive is bathed in honey as brilliant as it is fatal and it is the Nazi, not the Jew, at the end, who is murdered.

The audience was made up almost entirely of Jews in their 60s, 70s and 80s, plus a dozen or so of their children like me and, as far as I could tell, two gentiles. Like my mother and stepfather, many make it their business to devour these plays and films, talks, exhibitions and tours that explicate, piece by piece, yet another unearthed Holocaust episode. I found it hard to tell why my generation didn't much show up. Perhaps interest would develop at some point, when mortality tightened its grip and conferred its duty. Or perhaps they wouldn't come at all.

The response to the performance was polarised. Strong clapping alternated with arms folded across chests, producing the misleading impression of mild applause. The actors retreated. In their place a table and three chairs were set up on stage for a triumvirate of smart, mouthy personalities. Konrad Kwiet, Jeremy Lawrence, the Chief Rabbi of Sydney's Great Synagogue, and the play's director, Moira Blumenthal. For our benefit they exchanged a bit of good-tempered disagreement.

The professor's voice was loudest. His primary complaint was that the characters were stereotypes. Max, the Jew, embodied the archetypal "*Jew Süss*" from Lion Feuchtwanger's 1925 novel of the same name, with his emphatic physical gestures, crumpled clothes, his soft language and profession, an intrinsically decent art dealer who nonetheless delights in seductively swindling wealthy old ladies. Martin, the gentile, Kwiet saw as an Adolf Eichmann type, a textbook Nazi bureaucrat who blossomed in the business of facilitating the murder of Jews from a safe distance.

The audience was twitching. It was one of the non-Jews who grabbed the first moment to speak. She rose, prefacing her observation with the caveat "I am not Jewish, but..." Her close-cropped blonde hair appeared as a halo over a magnanimous smile. She said something about how the play spoke of the humanity amid the greatest of inhumanity. Like our collective shrink she urged us to consider what could unite us beyond our shared suffering. We clapped our appreciation and seemed briefly humbled. One by one, hands flew up and grievances were unloaded. Few bothered to frame their thoughts as questions.

Towards the end, a sixtysomething man in a *Kippah* seated in front of my mother and I spoke in a South African rasp. With his arms bent across his chest, one leg crossed over the other, he held his body perfectly still as he fulminated. He agreed with the professor's

suggestion that its characters represent caricatures; but he went further. He suggested that Max, in his finely wrought revenge on his former friend, invoked the most damning stereotype of all. The Jewish blood libel has been given oxygen, he bellowed. He demanded to know why the Jewish Board of Deputies didn't intervene to prevent the play from being staged. A few others murmured their assent.

I couldn't stifle myself and demanded of him from behind.

"Are you advocating censorship?"

He did not respond. I shot up my hand with false bravery. The professor, looking vexed, gestured in my direction. My courage deserted me and with it the coherence I had envisaged. I pressed on.

"To me, the play counters the familiar 'Jews-as-victims' narrative," I tried. I was not appalled by stereotypes. What I saw was something un-stereotypical. It was a playing out of the wish that, with our wits, we Jews can reject our role as the world's scapegoat. I paused and grasped the sea of blank faces. I rushed to prop things up with a confession:

"I am a Jew married to a German. We have 18-month-old twins. When I gave birth to them, mixed up somewhere with the joy, I felt a small sense of revenge."

There was an audible gasp. Professor Kwiet shook his head. I sat down, my face and neck pink and warm, my heart punching my chest. My mum squeezed my hand.

The professor was talking. He was saying that there were numerous cases when the Jews resisted in the ghettos and camps: Warsaw, Bialystok, Treblinka, Sobibor, Auschwitz. He turned to tell me that there was an exhibition documenting these and dozens of other uprisings at the Sydney Jewish Museum last year. I nodded. I had visited that exhibition. In an area about six metres square, information boards testified to the courage of these extraordinary women and men. I had studied the paragraphs and grainy photographs and marvelled. I grasped the dignity they had achieved in the face of certain death. I felt sure that under the same conditions I would have lacked their courage. I walked around the exhibits a second time to ensure I had borne witness to it all. I

reminded myself that countless other courageous acts must have been lost into history's dustbin.

After the play, I went home and did some of my own fulminating. I was perplexed as to why so much of the audience had been antithetical to a play I had found so brilliant, so revolutionary. Taylor had penned a giant "F-you" to the painful idea that we Jews were passive lambs, and she had done it in 1938. If her work dealt in stereotypes then its business was in upending them. Had good sense fallen prey to persecution complexes? Was the second generation so attached to their victim narratives that they couldn't indulge in a bit of revenge fantasy?

My pride was buzzing like a fridge in the night. I paced the living room, knocked my forehead on the wall. I needed to write down the words I had failed to properly say. I wanted to convince all those old Jews to think anew. My mind swerved. I had to write something somewhere I could be certain they would read. The next morning I called the *Australian Jewish News* and asked to speak to the editor, Zeddy Lawrence, who happened to be the brother of Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence from last night's panel. I made my pitch. He said he'd be very interested. Here is some of what I wrote:

> "The revenge at this play's end doesn't seem to me to perpetuate a heinous Jewish stereotype. It seems to subvert one. This betrayed Jew doesn't lie down for his executioner. Instead, with great finesse, in cold blood, he delivers his hangman to his own grave. It is a morality tale steeped in wishful thinking.
>
> My own wishful thinking propels me towards Germany, not away from it. I fell in love with a man who happens to be German. Our relationship is not founded in revenge but in love. As we all know, love transcends race, religion and any other construct you care to throw at it. Just as it once was between the two friends in the play. End of story, but not quite. Beneath Max and Martin's pre-war platonic love lay a trapdoor to betrayal; an exit clause for times of duress.
>
> There is a shard of revenge in my joining together with a German. There is victory in mingling our blood together within our children in spite of the Nazis' attempt to

annihilate us to ensure their so-called “racial purity”. This feeling of revenge is small but fierce – a drop of blood in an ocean – but it is there. And perhaps it should be.”

The following week I opened my mum’s copy of the *Australian Jewish News.* On the letters page was a reply.

Don’t Ignore Heroic Lions Who Fought Back

Further to Lisa Dabscheck’s column (AJN 23/03), I must set the record straight: We did not go like lambs to slaughter. There were many revolts, uprisings and partisan fighters. The heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto were not lambs, but heroic lions.

I admire her approach to the love between herself and her German husband. It is indeed a sweet revenge on Hitler. Of course we do not blame the younger generation for the horrendous sins of their ancestors. Often in my life I wished I would be able to acquire her feelings of reconciliation. But the great pain persists. I am an old Holocaust survivor who at the age of 15-16 lost my entire family (I mean entire). It is a hard nut to swallow.

Lisa, when your children grow up and you succeed in explaining to them that their father’s ancestors have murdered your people, and if they accept this, then and only then will you be able to claim success. And I sincerely hope you achieve that. I wish you and your husband a lifetime of happiness together.

Australian Jewish News Friday 30 March, 2012

Chapter Ten
Munich, August 2012

Six months later we were in Munich. A sabbatical for Simon, a research trip for me, a cross-cultural experience for the kids, and something of an experiment: could we live in Germany?

The older kids had spent a few weeks at a bilingual school. Sammy and Lucia knew some German. They had heard it from babyhood, when their *Oma* was still alive. She used to visit us from Sussex in the UK, where their father's parents had moved from northern Germany in their twenties, and where he and his brothers had grown up. She would tell the kids stories and sing them the songs of her wartime childhood in her mother tongue. She had adored joining us for our Friday nights, when she'd peppered us with questions and delighted in tasting every dish. Now, a few years after she had died, I hoped her grandchildren might find something of her in the language and place where she came from.

The twins, at almost two, were already bilingual in their way, although they preferred to answer Simon in English. Even better was squirming into and out of our arms and scallywagging under our feet, especially if they belonged to their big brother and sister.

"I don't want you to panic, darling."

I heard Simon's voice falling down the staircase from where I stood in the kitchen of the skinny townhouse we'd rented for three months in Altschwabing, a part of Munich that used to be a village before the city grew all the way up to it a hundred years ago.

"But there's a bomb around the corner."

The saucepan in my hand clanged like a cymbal on the stove as I dropped it. Simon was already downstairs, laptop in hand, pressing his hands on my shoulders, telling me to relax.

"It's an old bomb from the war, it's probably got no charge in it."

He sat at the dining table behind me and tapped into his computer. I held the wooden spoon aloft.

"Really, it's not all that unusual." He smiled. People find old Allied bombs all over Germany, he was telling me, like when they're setting foundations for buildings, pulling out fence posts, renovating. Sometimes they made the news. Usually they were as dead as doornails.

“Well, if you’re sure…”

I left the sentence there. Every so often Simon called out with emerging snippets. The bomb weighed 250kg. It might still have some charge left in it. It had been discovered a few hours ago on a construction site a block away, right next to our favourite pizza place, whose outdoor area had been kitted out with deckchairs and a patch of sand where the twins played while we waited for dinner. In the construction site next door their toy digger was replicated in real life, its scoop frozen.

I took the stairs up to our bedroom. As I folded clothes into open suitcases for our trip to Madrid the following day, I heard the distant sounds of sirens. They made the slow bellow of a black and white film, the low wails of covered ears and slow motion scampering into bunkers. I stopped packing, skidded downstairs and started hollering questions. How dangerous was it? How worried should we be? Simon answered like a hobby engineer. It was difficult to say. It was critical to factor in the diminishing power of the bomb’s electrochemical fuse over the past 70 years. An estimate of its force might be formulated according to various contingencies…

I wasn’t listening. I was watching the light from the screen play in his eyes. He looked like a kid in a boys’ own adventure. He was not the type to sweep up his loved ones at the first sign of danger, stash them under his cloak and gallop towards freedom. He would rescue us, slowly, with reason.

By now it was early evening. The kids could use some fresh air. Perhaps we could go down and point out the heavy machinery? I suggested, thinking the scene might reveal the degree of its seriousness. As I searched for one of Lotte’s missing shoes, we heard the sirens again. Between the bleats we caught the drone of a recorded voice, the insistent monotone of someone in uniform.
“*Achtung ... Achtung,”* it intoned. “*Hier spricht die Feuerwehr*.”

From close acquaintance with Milo, I knew that this meant the fire department was involved. I stuck my head out of one of our living room windows. The footpath, normally an exemplar of inner city pedestrianism, was deserted. The fire engine looked as if it had been borrowed from a museum. A megaphone was attached to its low roof. I felt the urge

to cower somewhere, preferably in a secret compartment. I made a quick scan of the living room. Our landlady happened to be one of the directors of the *Pinakothek der Moderne* so there was plenty of art hanging around. I thought of the stash of hundreds of paintings that had been discovered earlier in the year by police in the apartment of the son of a wartime art dealer, just a few streets away. Works by Cézanne, Matisse, Gaugin, Chagall, Kandinsky and virtually any other 20th century great that could be named had been found stacked up like muesli boxes between decades-old tins of soup. It had already been reported that among the works were those the Nazis had deemed to be "degenerate art". The questions of how they'd been acquired, from whom, and at what price, were yet to be determined.

I could hear the four kids larking upstairs. I opened the front door and dashed up and down the stairwell that connected us to the apartment block next door, pounding on the doorways until my knuckles reddened. Nobody answered. On tiptoe, I pressed an eye against a peephole, but the magnification was reversed so that my outsider's view shrunk to a muddy kaleidoscope. The heavy carpet prickled the soles of my feet and coursed up to my chest, which pinkened and began to itch.

I pictured the bomb; a rusty phantom. The idea that it could explode into the present seemed as far-fetched as the British or American soldier who'd dropped it being reincarnated in present-day Munich. I went back inside. Simon leaned back in his chair far enough to alarm me, then reported his conviction. Even if the bomb detonated, the blast would be fairly minor.

"How minor?"

"Pretty minor."

"I don't have a frame of reference for this," I offered unsteadily. "Could you talk me through it?"

"What do you want to know, exactly?"

"Like, what would happen to this building if the bomb went off?"

“It’s hard to say. There could be some damage…"

“How much damage?”

“Well,” he responded. “I’m not sure. Some of the windows might break.”

A small smile formed on his lips. He uttered the requisite phrase.

“I have a plan.” I shot him a skeptical look.

“I think the best place for us to be is on the stairs,” he continued, his expression untroubled as he glanced towards the steep flights that separated the four floors from one another.

“That’s probably the strongest part of the structure, the best fortified,” he continued. “So even if there was some damage elsewhere in the building, it would be the safest place for us to be.”

I pictured the six of us in a few minutes’ time, huddled under blankets while we waited for the bomb to detonate. Would I search the cupboards for Thermoses and make cocoa? I gave the stairs a look that expressed my disdain, took them two by two and made for the bathroom, where I used my forearm to sweep toiletries into bags. I pulled clothes still on their hangers and dropped them in. I seized our passports, called out to the kids, exploded back downstairs, flipped the lid shut on Simon’s laptop and grabbed him by the arm. I could hear the disembodied instructions still droning around the neighbourhood, softer and louder, softer and louder until it was back on our street.

“*Achtung, Achtung*…” The words that followed were muffled, but their meaning was clear: “*Raus!*” The voice receded as we hit the street with the twins in each of the older kids’ arms, our suitcases stumbling down our abandoned street. A pair of officials were stationed at a barrier on our nearest corner. I watched them arrange their bodies for reprisals. As we drew closer, they eyed Lotte and Milo with their golden curls and soft cheeks and settled for a warning: we must leave the area immediately. We would not be permitted to reenter until it was all over, was that clear?

We took a cab to the airport and checked into a hotel. The following morning, as we flew towards Spain, a specialist team evacuated any stragglers, arrived at the bomb site, covered it in sandbags and hay and, at a safe distance, detonated the bomb. It exploded, setting fire to the site and the surrounding buildings. Nobody was killed or injured, but the damage was considerable.

A week later, we returned home. We dropped our suitcases inside the door. I walked to the stairs and lowered my body. I noticed how the hairs on my forearms rose above my skin. I moved my bottom around on the stair tread. Nothing happened. The artworks were still hanging. I stood and moved towards the windows, with their segmented panes.
That was when I saw the cracks.

Chapter Eleven
Berlin, September 2012

The square of torn-out notebook paper was softening in my fist as it mixed with a film of sweat. “U-Bahn U7, Wilmersdorferstrasse, P-Strasse X.” My hand flexed involuntarily. I opened it and saw the letters had bled ink, leaving a blue tattoo in my palm. I quickened my pace, bowed my head, eyed the other pedestrians without seeming to. Onto their backs I projected the billboard posters that had accosted me underground at the train station.

A young boy, four or five years old, dressed in a striped t-shirt and jeans, held his pudgy hands over his crotch. Overlaid in a childish font were words put into his mouth by adults.

“*Mein Körper gehört mir.*” My body belongs to me.

At the bottom, a strapline declared.

“*Zwangsbeschneidung ist unrecht. Auch bei Jungen*.” Forced circumcision is wrong. Also for boys.

It was sponsored by a foundation that called itself “For Children’s Rights”. I didn’t miss the correlation between male circumcision and female genital mutilation.

The sound of my heels striking the pavement rang out like an alarm. Click-clack-clickclack. I crossed the street and hit a pair of inset metal plates, those lids that can be levered off the footpath to expose the gaps in the world beneath our feet. Ding-ding-ding. Male circumcision is the removal of the foreskin from the penis that occurs in a third of the world's male population, whether for religious, medical or cultural reasons. I knew that, unlike in other western democracies including the US and Australia, circumcising boys isn't considered "normal" here. Boys are circumcised in Germany if there are health issues, or if they are Muslim or Jewish. *Punkt*, full stop, as Germans like to say. I assumed the organisers of this campaign weren't addressing those for whom circumcision is medically advisable.

I marched away, my strides growing longer, the words pressing at my back, darkening my thoughts about who would determine whether Jews could be free to be Jewish in Germany.

I thought of Sammy. It was school holidays now. He was at a summer camp with Lucia run by the *Goethe-Institut* with a bunch of other kids from all over the world. They took German classes in the mornings. In the afternoons they could raft, ride horses, canoe, hike, swim. Milo was elsewhere in the Bavarian countryside with Lotte, where Simon had taken them to visit his parents. I had taken the train on my own to Berlin.

The choices I had made for my two sons, just a week after each of them was born, had not been easy. They nudged my conscience as much as they comforted me. Then and now I could cast my decisions as both legitimate and mistaken, depending on which ethical frame I applied to them. How easy it would have been if I could tuck them away into neat boxes of "right" and "wrong", comforted by the salve of self-righteousness.

Three months earlier, around 600 kilometres south-west of where I tore my path along a west Berlin street, a judge in a minor Cologne court had made a ruling that had inspired the campaign being waged on billboards around Germany, and which meant Jewish life in Germany was now in jeopardy. Hours after a hospital circumcision, a four-year-old Muslim boy in Cologne had been bleeding excessively, distressing his mother, who had arrived back at the hospital with her son, crying uncontrollably. She didn't speak German. The hospital staff convened and agreed to act on her and her son's behalf. The

circumcision, they imputed, must have been forced. They called the police, who helped bring about a court intervention.

Looking at the dynamics at play was like pressing my eye against the lens of a microscope. Under it I could make out particles, invisible to the naked eye, that, it seemed, lived in the subcutaneous layer of a critical mass of German society. The ruling against circumcision had pierced the membrane of *gemütlichkeit*, those nebulous ideas as to "what Germans feel comfortable with".

The trial went ahead. None of the hospital staff who had performed the botched operation was charged with any offence. The ruling concluded that circumcision of minors constituted grievous bodily harm and should be illegal. Freedom of religious practice and the rights of the parents were displaced by those of the child. There was an implied threat attached: the next person to circumcise a child in the country would be prosecuted.

The previous evening I'd had dinner with friends in the central Berlin district of Mitte. They had taught me by example a gesture I had never seen before I went to Germany. It involved pressing the back of your hand underneath your jaw, fingers outstretched, then with a simultaneous lifting of the chin and a horizontal flicking of the wrist, you could brush away anything unworthy of your anxiety. This, I thought, wouldn't be done away with so easily.

I walked past apartment buildings at the heart of what had been a vibrant pre-war Jewish hub. I rushed onwards, out of sync with the trees, whose leaves hung like children at their mothers' skirts. Late summer hummed its lovers' tune, its long rays lighting the remains of Sunday evening. In this city that wears its history as wallpaper, such pleasantness seemed like none of my business. That was other peoples' Berlin. I'd seen the hipsters in Kreuzkölln, the pram-pushers in Prenzlauerberg, the fashionistas in Mitte, all of them skipping by in their canvas plimsolls. I'd watched the tourists playing hide and seek, drinking beer, taking selfies in the shadowed maze of the Memorial To The Murdered Jews of Europe near the Brandenburg Gate. I'd stood before the KaDeWe department store that was founded by Jews and confiscated by the Nazis. Opposite me was the man who stations himself near the doors with his "Zio-Nazi" sandwich-boards, a fixture of moral relativism directly across the road from the Wittenbergplatz train station from where, seven decades ago, the city's Jews were systematically deported to their

deaths. A giant billboard stationed at its entrance notes their destinations: Auschwitz, Stutthof, Maidanek, Treblinka, Theresienstadt, Buchenwald, Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, Bergen Belsen, Trostenez, Flossenbürg.

I was counting numbers fiercely now, interrogating the streetscape for the wrought iron, the *Magen David*, the stained glass. Instead I saw a young man outside an unremarkable door set into the facade of a pre-war building. I met his eyes, emeralds shining at me like traffic lights.

"*Gut Yontef*" I offered in the Yiddish my mother and *Buba* had gifted to me.

"*Shana Tova*", he replied in mellifluous Hebrew, his dimpled smile flashing.

His head curved to the right towards a rectangular anteroom, where a pair of guards exchanged wisecracks behind an X-Ray machine. One of them asked for my handbag. He felt inside it with his hands while his eyes remained fixed on my face then they slid towards his colleague. The men spoke in one of the languages of my ancestors' homelands; words I didn't understand. I looked to my stained palms for comfort. I realised my dress was too short for synagogue. Black was the wrong colour for *Rosh Hashanah*. I should have been wearing bright colours, like the red and green apples we'd dip into honey in an hour or two. The guards gestured with their cheekbones to the door at the end of the room. I asked if they knew where the women sat. They shrugged in unison. I stepped into a leafy courtyard where a few kids were loitering amiably, an age-old device that alleviated the need to sit still inside the synagogue. I offered them a conspiratorial smile. There at last were the signs on a second, inner building, entirely hidden from the street. The great dome, the fluted stone, the Star of David.

The prayers had begun. The rabbi, pale and relatively young, was in full flight, the fullthroated voice of his cantor amplifying his presence. The men, who occupied the central downstairs sections, were praying and swaying. The women, scattered around the edges of the downstairs sanctuary and upstairs with their bird's eye view, were alternately praying and pressing words into each other's ears. I slipped into the nearest seat, sensing I would be noted. The dull wooden pew gave a creak. I looked up. High above us was the organist. With each press of her vibrating keys she filled the room with

the tenor of a Protestant church, inferring its progressiveness, at odds though it was with the segregated seating.

“My mother refused to come here,” said a woman beside me, her eyes following mine to the organ’s oversized flutes above the *Bimah*, her hands folded in her lap.

“But where else should I go?” she asked the ceiling.

You could, I thought but didn’t say, try one of the other eight synagogues dispersed around the city (or was it 12? I had heard various accounts). But I knew such choices were governed by forces more powerful than logic. Proximity, tradition, community, curiosity, rebellion, habit.

I had read that this *Shul* could hold 1400 people. Perhaps 80 seats were occupied on this, one of the busiest days of the Jewish calendar. I searched the faces around the perimeter of the ground level where I sat with most of the other women. Many were much older than me, some old enough to remember things I also couldn’t forget. I moved my gaze towards the cloistered ceiling. The room had stately bones, but they had been worn down, still more or less in its post-war condition; mended from the brutality of *Kristallnacht* with meagre late-1950s funds from the decimated community, I’d read. The Nazis had wreaked their savagery here, as elsewhere, but they had stopped short of setting fire to it on November 9, 1938. That had been merely pragmatism. The synagogue was built within a nest of non-Jewish buildings, bricked-in bystanders who would have otherwise have been engulfed in flames of hatred not meant for them. After the war, this hidden *Shul* was rehabilitated to a condition fit for service, not show. That would come later. The peeling grey paint would be sanded away, the patina of obsolescence exchanged for a shinier veneer. By the time I returned a few years later, the transformation would be complete. For now, old wounds showed themselves. I preferred it in this unvarnished state.

The rabbi brought the *Shofar* to his lips, the ram’s horn that is sounded on *Rosh Hashanah*. He blew into it like a bugle, the cry of longing, in a series of short and long bursts. In the upstairs gallery I saw Myriam with her daughters. The smaller one sat with her curly head on her mama’s shoulder, the bigger one’s green eyes kept darting from her prayer book to men’s seats below, hoping for her Papa, I imagined. Myriam had told

me about her ancestry when we had met for tea in her brightly tinted living room. On her mother's side she is descended from Lutheran farmers. On her father's side her forebears include Chassidic rabbis in Poland and New York. After a while she had risen from the table that looked as though it served both dining and for her work as the publisher of Jewish children's books, and pointed out mementoes. Old photographs, leather-bound prayer books. The original *Mezzuzah Klaf*, the parchment scroll inscribed with *Torah* verses that Jews attach to their doorposts inside decorative casings known as *Mezzuzot.* A historian had given it to her when she had been to the twin Polish cities of BielskoBiała where her great-grandfather had been the chief rabbi before he was shot dead in 1942.

"My grandfather emigrated to New York in 1924 in time to bring the closest family to the States. So we have a little bit of a happier story and a huge family because he was very far-sighted. My father was the first one not to become a rabbi in the lineage. My uncle became a rabbi. I have always thought of myself as part of this tradition."

She tucked thick auburn curls behind her ears as she spoke with the nonchalance of habit. Her voice was strident, with a clear American accent, although she was born in Germany and had lived here for much of her life, with long intervening stints in New York and Israel.

"I've always been close to religion, and I've always rejected this Israeli tradition of leaving religion to the far right and to the orthodox, and when I went to college in the States I saw egalitarian liberal services."

She lifted her teacup and the amber liquid greeted her eyes like the colours of autumn, the leaves and the trees. I saw how their gaze could turn serious.

I've always felt … I've always had a very close contact."

It was Myriam who had suggested I come here for the service followed by a communal dinner when we had met at the west Berlin apartment where she lives with her husband and children. The *Erev Rosh Hashanah* service, celebrating Jewish New Year's Eve, falls as late summer turns to autumn in the northern hemisphere. It is one of a handful of times in the year when even a quasi-secular Jew like me might go to synagogue. It's a

beautiful service, with its lilting melodies, its convivial atmosphere, and its promise of a sumptuous post-*Shul* family meal.

I gazed at the pulpit and pondered that elsewhere in the world, all kinds of Jews were doing much the same thing; their bottoms on hard benches, their open prayer books weighing down their wrists; their dreams of dinner. After the service, they would repair with their extended families to their homes and squeeze around extension tables improvised earlier in the day by husbands and sons under fierce maternal instruction. Their post-*Shul* chatter would be interrupted in service of a few prayers. Then they would dip the slices of raw apples into bowls of honey, the flavours twirling in everybody's mouths, now sweet, now sour, now buttery, now fresh. They would talk, pausing only to bite into a Dionysian feast and wish each other "Happy New Year!" with moist eyes and kisses. At the end there would be slices of dark honey cake. In my family, beef brisket, a traditional Ashkenazi main course of slow-cooked beef would appear in the middle, its sweet, smoky morsels melting into forkfuls of *Tzimmes*, shredded carrots sautéed in honey, sometimes with currants and spices thrown in, or with slow-cooked meat, potatoes and prunes, like my *Buba* used to cook it, its rich syrup threaded through her casserole dish.

All of it heavy with sugar and symbolism.

Here in Berlin there had been no invitations to *Rosh Hashanah* dinner of the kind my mum had offered to out of town visitors more times than I could remember. This meal was served not around the dining table of a friend of a friend of a cousin's family, the aromas of three days' cooking drifting from the kitchen. This *Rosh Hashanah* I sat in a hall, a second sanctuary adjacent to a synagogue, its festive air dampened with the mildew of loss. I tucked my knees under the tablecloth and considered the disposable plates, their flimsy surfaces stained with lukewarm falafel shop food. Tinned beetroot cubes bled their juice into tiny grid patterns. Grassy clumps of tabouleh sat beside darkening mounds of hummus. A couscous salad was enlivened by a few pomegranate seeds. My Ashkenazi prejudices were firing. This was *Yontef*, in Berlin. Where was the still-warm egg salad, the herring with sugared *Kichel*, the *Challah* carried by the hostess fresh to the table in her oven mitts; where was the *Tzimmes*? I pulled down the hem of my dress so that the chair wouldn't cut so rudely into the flesh of my thighs.

Another rabbi, much older and recently returned home to Germany for his swansong after several successful international postings, was leading the post-service prayers. He recited the words and we repeated them, the traditional to and fro playing between us like an elastic band, supple enough for us to slip up here and there, tight enough to hold us together. He was short and almost bald, with glasses shaped like twin moons, his white *Kippah* covering much of his scalp. Even in this capacious room, with snippets of chatter erupting around us, he held us with him, his gravelly baritone vibrating like Louis Armstrong's, reassuring us that the world was, despite it all, wonderful.

I picked up the plastic shot glass set in front of me that held the first measure of sweet *Kiddush* wine, the deep red sacramental unguent that is blessed and consumed in small doses on *Shabbat* and festivals. I longed for its hit of alcohol and sugar, but everything was untouchable until the rabbi gave us his signal. It was hard to gauge where this *Shul* sat along the sliding, not always linear, scale between ultra-progressive and ultra-orthodox Judaism. With its segregation of women and men and a more convoluted series of prayers than I was used to, I guessed it would be a while before we could eat or drink. Other aspects indicated otherwise. The young rabbi, whom I'd heard was a convert, the organ, the presence of a few guests who, on the basis of no more than instinct, I doubted were Jewish.

I leaned over to Myriam. This synagogue wasn't easy to pigeonhole, she told me.

"In Germany at the time I was growing up there were only orthodox synagogues," she whispered, throwing up her hands for emphasis. "People weren't orthodox, but they prayed and went to services in orthodox synagogues."

I knew by now that most of the *Yekkes*, those who had called themselves German Jews before the war, had gone one of two ways: either they emigrated abroad or they were murdered. Afterwards, those who remained were mostly orthodox Jews, chiefly survivors from eastern Europe with, as Konrad had emphasised to me, "nowhere else to go". Jewish life in Germany, such as it was, regressed a century or more, pulling the natural heirs of the movement that began here into a no-man's land.

“Today that’s totally changed,” Myriam continued. “We have liberal synagogues. That’s why we come here. It’s a liberal synagogue in the style of the turn of the century.” She drew breath.

“Of course it’s here in Germany that liberal Judaism originated.”

Her poise, reiterated in the deliberate way she enunciated each word, exploded into exasperation.

“This is where liberal Judaism started and the women are still not liberated!” She banged her fist on the table.

“It’s not an egalitarian service; it’s a liberal service where the women are not equal – that doesn’t exist anywhere else in the world!”

Her words struck me like shards. The pieces could never be put back together. It was the act of failing to be able to do so, I realised, that revealed what needed to be grasped.

As far back as the mid-19th century, I’d heard, a cohort of Berlin’s reform Jews had contemplated abandoning circumcision. Those who felt so finely knitted into the fabric of German society looked to the ways of their Christian neighbours. Many of them celebrated Christmas. There was talk of moving *Shabbat*, usually observed from sunset on Friday until sunset on Saturday, to Sunday. And if the gentiles didn’t practice circumcision, they reasoned, then why should they? The innovators’ plans were derailed by majority voices from within their own communities. Progress might take a number of forms, but circumcision was considered elemental. It was not negotiable.

The *Brit Milah* eight days after boys are born remains sacrosanct in reform synagogues in places such as New York, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, London, Sydney. All of these are rooted in what was created here in Berlin, where the unfurling ribbon was amputated, where the wounds could still be seen and felt. I looked around and saw a relic restored to operation, a house of ghosts revivified, even as the liberalism its proponents inspired has moved on apace, elsewhere.

Hashiveyni va'ashuva; El ha'aretz hatovah." "Hinei ma'tov umanaiyim, shevet achim gam yachad." These were songs I knew, their choruses at least; for the rest of the verses 'lai lai lai' would usually suffice. They had lived inside me since childhood, from primary school, from *Shul.* They were like the hands of old friends, our fingers interlaced unselfconsciously. They could carry me to anywhere in the world where there were Jews and build the foundations there for a shared home, even for just a few hours.

Seven or eight kids stood with the rabbi at the front, singing by heart and from sheafs of paper printed in Hebrew and phoneticised German, the same as the ones we held in front of us. We sang with them in the same proportions of remembering and forgetting. The rabbi's voice rumbled beneath them. The children rose to a crescendo then fell to whispers for the lamenting strains of *Avinu Malkenu*, whose melody could pull tears from a stone. At last the optimism of *Bashana Haba'ah* roused cries of Shkoyach! and applause.

"Shana Tova!" exclaimed the rabbi. "*Shana Tova*!" replied everybody with gusto.

Chapter Twelve

Myriam's husband Stephan had arrived and slipped into the empty chair opposite where she sat near me with their daughters. He wore the uniform of a powerful man: white shirt, striped tie, navy blue suit, well-cut. I knew he was the head of the Central Jewish Council of Jews in Germany. I had read some of the statements he made to the press. He didn't mince words or toe anybody's line. His dark hair, gold framed glasses and slightly outturned ears framed his face, where under a dusting of stubble a certain softness could be found. Like his wife he spoke English with a clear American accent. Myriam had told me he had converted to Judaism in his mid-twenties, years before they had met.

"He always felt that his family might have had Jewish roots and that they weren't passed down. His grandmother is from Romania, she was in a work camp, and his grandfather … there are some things where he always felt he hadn't heard the whole story," she had explained. "From his mother's side his grandmother had a Jewish surname, there were things like that." Her eyes settled on mine.

“So he felt that he was returning to Judaism rather than just converting.”

When I asked him, Stephan was characteristically blunt.

“I never belonged here. I call it: Accidentally born in Germany, raised American, Jewish by heart.”

“You were born in Germany?” I asked, incredulity built into the phrasing of my question.

“I don’t know how it happened but … ,” he broke off laughing.

At the age of six he had spent a few months in America visiting family with his parents. The trip left an indelible impression.

“The funny thing is, I always wanted to move to the US and leave Germany, then I thought ‘At least I’ll get married to an American, so the chances are …’ So what do I do? I get married to an American who doesn’t want to live in the US!”

Our laughter worked away at my emotional armour like a solvent. The echoes of the music, the resonance of sitting in a synagogue in Germany, for the first time in my life, not as a visitor to a museum but in a room full of fellow Jews marking the new year in familiar enough ways, the sweet wine in my mouth, came out all in a gush. I was struck by the feeling that we were recreating something. Stephan silenced me with a sweep of his hand across the table.

“German Jewry as it existed before ’33 is gone. There is no renaissance. It’s an insult to all those who were murdered.” I wiped at my eyes with the back of my hand.

“Listen,” he said, sounding very much like Professor Kwiet. “We’re in Berlin. There are 11,000 Jews. Seven synagogues.” Another tally, I reflected. Everybody seems to have their own.

“Look around,” he gestured to the room with a snap of his wrist. “You can hardly get 50 men in synagogue on *Rosh Hashanah*. Why would a Jew want to attend such a service?”

The older rabbi was doing the rounds of the room, dispensing his geniality among the congregation and guests. I rose to introduce myself and congratulated him. I explained why I was here.

“Ah,” he responded, offering me an overview of the intricacies of the community, with its state-imposed *Gemeinde* (in this case referring to the official Jewish community) acting as umbrella while the various denominations within the broader community huddled under it, each of them trying to grab hold of the stick, none of them wanting to get rained on. At a certain point, as he was extolling the endeavours of a fellow liberal rabbi running another synagogue under difficult conditions given robust inter-community politics, he paused.

“Don’t forget I’m retired!” he protested.

“You're retired?” I replied, answering one question with another in the typical way.

“I’m retired, yes,” he answered, although it still sounded like a question, with its rabbi’s inflection, inviting me to think some more.

“It doesn’t look like it!” I countered good-naturedly, and he laughed with me.

“I do only two *Shabbaton* a month,” the rabbi explained.

“And one semester my wife and I are teaching also at the Abraham Geiger *Kolleg*,” he said, referring to the newly established liberal rabbinical seminary in Potsdam, not far from Berlin.

“This is the attempt to create the real, the new rabbinic leadership that will turn the aggregate here into a German Jewry.”

“Because at the moment it’s not a German Jewry; it’s Jews in Germany?” I offered.

“Jews from different places, *ja*,” he replied. “There are very few rabbis here whose German is good enough.”

“Are there any ‘Russians’ here tonight?” I enquired.

“No, very few, very few. This is still quite German.” He scanned the room, searching, I supposed, for exceptions to that rule.

“But at that table, this lady and fellow on the left are from South America; this one in the middle, this is a visitor from Israel. And these two new boys there, I just saw them today here.

“Are they Jewish, the boys?” I asked.

He shrugged. “I don’t ask. You can ask! You say you’re a journalist and you’re interested in reporting.” He shrugged again. “I make it a principle. I don’t ask.”

At last, the apples and the honey. With my thumb and forefinger I plucked a slice from a bowl and passed the rest to my neighbour, a visiting middle-aged American. I bit into the crisp flesh with its slightly sour rind. Honey coated my tongue and dripped from my wrist down to the heel of my hand. I tried to wipe it away on my dress, where its sticky trail glistened under the ceiling lights.

The tables were arranged in an elongated U-shape like at Jewish weddings, with a head table along the short middle section, where the rabbi now sat before a cupboard swathed in velvet, its Hebrew lettering embroidered in golden thread; the everlasting lamp hanging before it in its brass housing. I sat on the outside edge about halfway along one side. Directly across the room, on the other side of the U with their backs to me, were “the boys” to whom the rabbi had referred, both in their twenties, both white blonde. From behind they looked like a pair of chic lampshades. Their hair was cut with a long straight fringe hanging over one eye, and a buzz cut close to the scalp on the other side. In the silent moments in the synagogue I had spotted them. I pushed my chair back, scraping it against the floor so that it shrieked. I blushed and walked over.

As they turned their heads I saw they were delighted I’d come over. I wished them a good and sweet new year in Hebrew, *Shana Tova Umetakah*. They stood up as one, then each of them shook my hand and returned the wish. Despite the rabbi’s blessing of sorts, I wasn’t inclined to ask for their credentials. The taller one wore rectangular hornrimmed

glasses with a grey, slim-fitting suit. His voice was high. He was a counter-tenor, he told me. We exchanged the usual pleasantries. He lived in Berlin, but was born in Frankfurt.

“What brings you here?” he asked, and after my reply I posed him the same question.

“Well, I have a great-grandmother who was Jewish. I was raised by communists. So I have no confession at all. I’m free to choose.”

“Communists in Frankfurt?” I quipped, winking at his companion.

“Yeah, well western communists, with a Protestant background,” he smiled. “That’s the way I was raised, so I found my own way back here. I’ve spent quite a bit of time in Israel.”

I moved my attention back to his friend. He told me about his mother’s father. “We think his mother was Jewish.” I smiled. “I’ve been looking into it.”

“I’m thinking of converting,” he added.

“Are you sure you want to?” I cautioned.

We laughed. I wished them *Gut Yontef*. They hadn’t heard that before.

“That’s the Yiddish version,” I explained.

I thought of the times I had whispered that pair of words into Simon’s ear at family dinners; the sound of his voice, *sotto voce,* as he practised them once or twice before he offered them to my mum, to my stepfather, to me, to our children, to everybody else at the table.

“The Yiddish language actually died in Germany,” one of the “boys” commented.

“Yes, but it lives on elsewhere,” I replied with a double wink.

The caterer came over to clear some plates. Like so many Israelis in this town, she was from Tel Aviv. The counter-tenor chatted to her in Hebrew. I thought of Benyamin, an

Israeli photographer I had met a few weeks earlier. He might find these young men intriguing for his work, I thought as I wished them adieu and returned to my seat.

“What do you think motivates them, these gentiles who turn up to synagogue here?” I had asked Benyamin when I visited him in his studio. It was on the ground level of a modernist building on Brunnenstrasse, not far from the Bernauerstrasse metro station that had been a “ghost” stop in the GDR, a no-man’s land through which trains from east to west Berlin ran without stopping.

“Isn’t it…?”

“Guilt” we said together.

“But they don’t say so,” Benyamin continued. “If you ask, they will never say it, but it’s guilt.”

“What will they say?”

“They’ll say, ‘It’s research, just to give something back,” he replied. “And then they’ll say that they searched in their family and they found out that somebody was Jewish, or partly Jewish.”

Benyamin sat facing me on the other side of a desk. Between us lay a bower bird’s collection of objects, like prompts a psychologist might use to arouse a patient’s memory. His answers were framed with a sardonic smile that made his slanting eyes disappear into the corners of his face. He was born in 1976 in the town of B’nei B’rak, the epicentre of ultra-orthodox Judaism not far from Jerusalem to an ultra-orthodox Jewish family, the fifth of 11 children. He had moved to Berlin as an escape route of sorts, although he remained close to his family. Each image he handed to me was so potent with meaning I was afraid I’d drop it.

“It was only when I came here that I started to ask questions,” he confessed. “‘What does it mean, me being here?’.”

He answered his own question.

“I’m still dealing with it. I’m taking photos and collecting photos and doing research, and I’m asking myself why the *Shoah* came from here.”

He moved his gaze to the streetscape behind me.

“I think it could have been in any place too, in other circumstances. But I’m here, so I’m dealing with it in a way.”

He drew breath and moved his eyes back towards mine. “The more I live here, the more complicated it is. But I’m not obsessive about it. I know people who are obsessive about it, I know many Germans who are.”

“What do they do, these Germans who are obsessed with Jews?” I asked him.

“They become Jews.”

Picture windows framed the streetscape. They must have once displayed wares for sale, before Berlin was reunited and gentrified and rent became, for a time, breathtakingly cheap. A single phalaenopsis orchid, still in its tub of earth, had been jammed into a French bistro glass. Beside it was a half-eaten block of chocolate and a Tupperware filled with almonds, raisins, more chocolate. You would find the same snack food in my mother’s pantry, or my own. Sweet and savoury, hard and soft, nestled together, a *nush* for between meals, to calm the nerves.

There were some Hebrew books too, a black velour *Kippah*, folded neatly. I pictured it slipping off his silky dark hair, which kept flopping to each side of his fleshy forehead. There was an old cigar box, ajar. “Otto Boenicke, Berlin” read the name on its side. Benyamin fiddled with it, opening and closing the lid, a metronome for his thoughts. I doubted there were cigars inside, and when he finally let the lid fall back, he pulled out a stack of small, yellowed photos with straight and wavy edges that he had collected from flea markets. One of them showed a woman in a floral summer dress with a curled coiffure. She was bent down to a German shepherd who returned her loving gaze with his tongue hanging low from his mouth. They were somewhere in the countryside, with a patch of grass where they sat and a dusty path behind that looked as if it led to a lake.

He flicked the creamy picture to the back of the pack, revealing half a dozen soldiers in various states of undress. One was naked, five or six others were in knee-length boxer shorts, reaching to stick their sinewy legs and arms into uniform pants and jackets. They crouched and stood in a field of open grass beside another lake, their jackboots sitting in pairs all around them.

“I feel that the Germans have lost something that is very essential to the idea of who they are,” Benyamin said, breaking the silence.

“When I speak to people it seems that they are ashamed of being German, and that’s not a good thing for the country. I have tried in some of my new works to find imagery of what it was to be German in the Middle Ages, from mythology, from the Romantic era. There was a lot that belonged to Germany.”

His olive complexion looked pale in the unfiltered light; he still had the jaundiced indoor skin of a Yeshiva boy. He wore a red short-sleeved shirt in a light plaid that looked like it had been neither ironed nor recently washed. He might’ve borrowed it from Mick Jagger, together with the cavalier arch of his brows, the ripe breadth of his mouth and his rangy frame.

Hadn’t he been part of an exhibition at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, about what it means to be Jewish in Germany? He corrected me.

“It was about what it is to be German, but I showed something very Jewish.” His eyes closed so that they seemed to wink a little. “It was a still life.”

He reached behind him and from a cabinet pulled out his portrait of a young Hassidic man, naked to the waist, wrapping the black leather straps of *Teffilin* around his left arm and his forehead.

“It symbolises these two lives – one very religious and one physical, sexual and nihilistic, homoerotic. And it’s in a way a portrait of myself. I don’t know how they see it at the museum. I know it was very popular; they liked it very much in the press, and they put it on billboards on the streets.”

There were other billboards plastered around Berlin now.

“Now there is the question here in Germany of circumcision,” Benyamin said, reading my thoughts, offering yet another interpretation.

“And there is already talk of bringing up the *Shoah*,” He caught my gaze in his.

“It’s stupid. It’s childish. To make these kinds of connections is a provocation.”

I raised an eyebrow at him without producing any words. He continued.

“Some in the Jewish community will bring the *Shoah* into this debate to make a kind of justification, to make a point. I think it’s pornographic in a way, in a press-seeking kind of way. It has nothing to do with the law.”

It took me a few moments to grasp Benyamin’s gist; he was alluding to the weight of history that Jews in post-Holocaust Germany hold in their bodies and, to some extent in their hands. This heaviness barely needs to be acknowledged to be noticed by others. Jews, simply by virtue of the extraordinariness of their continued existence, tend to remind Germans of the Holocaust. When Jews do more than exist, when they enter the public fray via their community leaders, their words hold a weight that is requisite to the history, with powerful, often mixed effects. The public debate unfolding already around the “rights” and “wrongs” of circumcision was testament to that. The other debates, the ones that take place in the communities between Jews, or at home, in the private thoughts of one Jew or another, are much less understood.

“I was not educated in this way,” Benyamin continued. “In the orthodox community we never talked about the *Shoah*. There was no education about it. It was God and that’s it.

“Because the difference between the ultra-orthodox and other Jews … my family sees it as a punishment from God. So they will say, ‘Yeah, the Jews in Germany ate pork, they dressed like the *Goyim*, that’s why God brought the Shoah’.”

I stalled for a moment, wondering which, or perhaps whose factors would determine how things would resolve.

“But what do you think about circumcision itself?”

“I think the parents should choose ... because if they choose for their kids a religious life, it’s …” He paused.

“Not negotiable,” I concluded.

“Yes,” he replied, before moving back to his point.

“But now there is a big problem with the law here, and this has to be solved with lawyers. We have to think of how can we get out of this situation in the language of the law. Laws here are very powerful, and holding a knife to a baby is against the law. Full stop. And that’s the way he thought, this judge. And yeah, he brought up a Pandora’s box, but the way to fix it is also with the law.”

He paused, his hands now perfectly still.

“It’s very rational. It has to be. And I think bringing up the *Shoah* will not help. We have this history that millions of people were murdered. But then there is the law.”

Chapter Thirteen

Somewhere in our conversation at the *Rosh Hashanah* dinner Stephan mentioned that he had studied law. My thoughts turned to the topic I knew must be dominating his agenda at work.

“If it comes down to a legal question, what do you think would happen?” I asked him.

“If it comes down to it,” he replied, “even if the politicians pass a law that allows it, we are not sure yet whether somebody will question the law and drag it all the way up to the supreme court; and if that happens we’re not sure whether we will succeed at the supreme court, because the supreme court has made many decisions against religious freedom in the past.” I swallowed, struggling to digest the implications.

“Look, it’s not a discussion about law, it’s not a discussion about children’s welfare, it’s not a discussion about health,” he continued, counting off the points on his thumb and first two fingers.

“It’s simply a discussion that serves those who want to live out their stereotypes.” He pushed his weight onto his forearms, pressing them into the table.

“If we could prove as hard facts that you could live twenty years longer being circumcised, it wouldn’t make a difference in the discussion. Nobody wants to hear that. ‘We are protecting little children, crying babies’,” he mimicked the prevailing tone of German voices that could be heard on the radio and the television, in all of the newspapers.

“I wish I could say they are fighting for the welfare of the children. But spare me that crap. None of those folks now being so outspoken on the welfare of the children did I see when I was a member of the child commission of the federal *Bundestag*, fighting against the violation of women, of children, of child pornography. *None* of those idiots were there!”

“So are you suggesting it’s an opportunity for people to express their prejudices against Jews?” I asked, apparently stating the obvious, as I leaned towards him, trying to move myself beyond the earshot of our handful of table neighbours.

“Yes,” he replied squarely, adopting a husky conspiratorial tone.

I frowned. “How will it end, do you think?”

“Honestly I don’t know,” he replied, leaning further back in his chair so that the end of his tie grazed the table.

“I don’t share the optimism that everything is done. We are now in the process that the minister of justice will present a draft. Of course we are trying to influence that and convince them. There will be hearings in parliament; it will be a public discussion, but 75 per cent of the population are already against us.”

I scanned the room and reflected on the German-Jewish post-Holocaust relationship. Was that mutually upheld thing about to be debunked, like the German-Jewish symbiosis that had supposedly been shared from the Enlightenment until the Holocaust?

“What did you think about Charlotte Knobloch’s op-ed piece?” I asked as the conversation beside us reached a hiatus.

A handful of heads swivelled in on our direction. Two weeks earlier, Knobloch had asked, “Do you still want us?” in an editorial for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The public discussion, an institution of which I’d found Germans to be inordinately fond, seemed to be taking place almost exclusively between them, a self-appointed authority who would apparently determine the issue’s moral dimensions and presumably the outcome. The night before with friends, I had watched a television talk show “debate”. Nobody on the panel was Jewish or Muslim.

Knobloch’s article opened with a statement that spoke for much of the community.

“For sixty years as a survivor of the *Shoah* I defended Germany,” she wrote. “Now I wonder if that was right. Know-it-alls talk unrestrainedly about ‘child torture’ and ‘trauma’ when it comes to circumcision. In doing so, they only accomplish one thing: to question the vanishingly small Jewish existence in Germany.”

Her words had not been taken lightly. Chancellor Angela Merkel took note, as she did of reactions abroad, where generalised uneasiness about Jewish life in Germany fixed its apotheosis to finger-wagging headlines. The debate offered easy fodder for the thesis that Jews naive enough to live in Germany were being suitably punished, and that, despite the decades of public atonement, Germany remained essentially unaltered.

“I’m thankful that she said what she said,” replied Stephan.

“Because she is the only one that can say that. I don’t think that she is overshooting, I think she is right. If we get a situation where we are not allowed, under our ritual rules, to circumcise: what bigger lie can you tell yourself than to stay in this country and create a Jewish life?”

He made the gesture that affirmed his Jewishness more than any hereditary evidence could have managed; the shrugging of the shoulders, the raising of the eyebrows, the opening of the palms.

“If you skip this fundamental right, what sense would it make to live in this country?”

“So this could turn into a battle between legal might and political will,” I suggested, leaning forwards. “Effectively because of the political desire for Jews to live in Germany. But if the legal system makes it impossible, then … the Jews will leave?”

“If we take our Judaism seriously as an identity, we would have to leave,” Stephan answered.

He raised his hands behind his head so that his elbows stuck out like parentheses. “And a German court would complete what Hitler never completed: Get Deutschland *Judenrein*.”

I shuddered. Stephan went on.

“Charlotte Knobloch is one of the last survivors who is active. She has said publicly, ‘Germany is my home’ although she had her doubts, like other survivors had. The point is that we all like to see the world a little bit more rosy than it is because you feel damn depressed if you wake up in the morning and people keeping hitting you in the face and you keep telling yourself this is a wonderful place to live.” He drew breath.

“Because if you take everything together, what we have discovered in the last 60 years,” his voice grew softer and his words slipped out solemnly.

“One has to be totally through the roof not to acknowledge that there are better places in the world to live as a Jew than in Germany.”

Myriam came back over to the table with an older woman with sea-green eyes set into the contours of a face that I recognised from old photographs. Susanne held out her hand while she appraised me. We spoke briefly. Her parents had escaped Nazi Germany to Shanghai in ’39, where she was born seven years later. They had emigrated to Israel but had neither adapted to the people nor to work or the climate, and in the 1950s they

had returned to Berlin, where she had grown up, married a non-Jewish German man and raised their three children, first in Bonn and later again in Berlin. Her husband had died a decade previously. He was a man who cared deeply about social justice. He had studied law and worked in the Ministry of Justice.

She lowered her voice. There were things going on in Germany that she felt the urge to talk about. Myriam had told her about me. She appreciated that I was an outsider to her community in Berlin, indeed to Germany, yet that I was married to a German, and I was Jewish. Perhaps I would understand certain things, and she would be able to say things to me that she couldn't share with those who knew her, she whispered.

She had already prepared something for me, she said, handing me a piece of paper. I unfolded it and found her name, telephone number, address. She reached out to close it again, carefully along the same lines, met my eyes and pressed it back into my palm. In a subdued tone, her gaze dancing around the room, she suggested I call to arrange a time to meet. I replied as quietly as I could that I would be delighted. I instinctively lowered my eyes.

What secrets did she want to share with me? I imagined a row of secret notes hanging behind the collarbones that sat so symmetrically under the high angles of her cheekbones. She smiled and wished me *Shana Tova.* I returned her wishes and, still holding her note, watched her walk away. After a few steps she turned her head, as though to verify I was still there.

"How about tomorrow?" I mouthed.

"Yes," she replied, beaming and taking a few steps back towards me so that she could murmur,

"Come for Kaffee *und Kuchen*. At 3 o'clock."

People were beginning to leave. Stephan didn't seem in any hurry.

"I worked with Ignatz Bubis, God rest his soul," he said, picking up a thread from our earlier conversation, whispering the latter in Hebrew, "who was the president of the

Jewish Council, and who was the most open, the most outspoken – as a lawyer – not only for Jewish interests but for minority interests in Germany …" he trailed off.

"We are a tolerant country," his fingers brushed away some crumbs of *Challah* on the tablecloth, "until we are faced with a member of a minority who is prepared to challenge our complacency."

I leaned back in my chair. He told me a story I'd heard before, about German politicians 20 years ago who had insisted to Bubis, who was born in Breslau, that the Israeli leader was "his" president. I hadn't yet heard Stephan's version.

"Years later, little me comes into the Hotel Adlon for a meeting of lobbyists, nice, smart people in the parliamentary areas, no anti-Semites, at least not explicitly," Stephan continued. "I came in – and by the way I always get fed kosher fish, which is disgusting, and I have to smile and be happy about it while everybody else chews on their fillet steak." We chuckled.

"And one of the fellows who organises those lunches says, 'So great to have you here. Welcome. Could you give us some insights as to why your government decided to pull out the troops from the independent territories?' That terrible fish fell out of my mouth and I said, 'Wait a second, I wasn't aware that the *Bundeswehr* were occupying any independent territories, nor that my government decided to pull them out.' Half of those people were laughing like you are now. And I was laughing of course. The other half were staring in my face like 'Are you insane, what are you talking about?'"

I was glad there was no kosher fish in my mouth. Stephan composed himself before I did, making for the underside of our amusement.

"The problem is this way of being made a stranger in your own country, and that's exactly what Bubis felt. I have the same things 20 years later, and I get it every day." He shrugged. "They don't mean this badly. Nevertheless it's always the same story. Now the circumcision. Really, the worst thing about the circumcision is that we are made strangers in our own country. Three months ago those same politicians were telling me publicly…" His voice dropped to the baritone of a political oratory, "'The Judeo-Christian heritage of Europe…'

“The same politicians tell me now, ‘What you are doing with your children, this is off the scale. We have a different culture, we have a different way of protecting the welfare of our children’.”

I made a face.

Then he came to the knot tied to the edges of our thoughts, beckoning us to loosen it. The one whose name is *Pilpul*, that sits at the centre of Jewish religion, thought, practice, belief, tradition, culture; that filters down from the scholarly to the secular. It describes the rhetorical approach that the ancient sages used to conceive clarifications of their laws. Its process expresses the heart of what it is to be a Jew; to learn, to think, to reflect, to question in order to understand. In that sense Judaism is not a didactic religion. The path to enlightenment is traversed via re-examination and reinterpretation. That’s what those creatures in black do all day in their coats and hats, they study by rumination and endless discussion. From the heart of our tradition comes this imperative. That hive produces ideas that tend to be in flux. So that when the community, a minority in all places but one, is attacked, and a communal message is deployed, its demand for consensus dispenses – as it must – with the currents swirling around it.

“Look, I can understand that the whole issue is worth a discussion,” Stephan offered. “It’s a discussion for every Jewish parent. None of us takes that discussion easily. It’s not something that you do easily.” His eyes lifted as though we were being observed from above.

“There is a discussion among Jews – whether it should change, whether it should be made different, a whole discussion – but they don’t let us discuss it, without saying ‘We know better’.

“Why do the German ‘school masters’ have to blame us and kick us and tell us without even listening, without even understanding how it works?”

“It’s the same thing again: you either kill the Jews or you save them from themselves. And that’s so disgusting.”

Chapter Fourteen

The journey to Susanne's* apartment took me out of the Berlin I had known. As the train moved along the suburban line it abandoned the neoclassical facades on the *Allees* and the boulevards. The hustle and grit of the metropolis sprayed us with its mist as we passed. I pictured the driver flicking a switch to wipe it away. The inside of the carriage could have been a hospital waiting room. Fluorescent lighting lit up upholstery that seemed designed to cheer us up as much as to hide our stains. The passengers took care to avoid eye contact while observing each other all the same. At each stop the carriage spat out passengers until only I and a few others remained. The light at the windows turned like a colour wheel from grey to the grassy shades of the trees. I pulled my handbag from my lap to my chest as we moved through territory pastoral and bland, deathly quiet.

Susanne lived in an apartment in a "block building". It had been built in 1954 to house American soldiers. I pressed the buzzer and heard its echo upstairs. The glass door with its utilitarian frame clicked open and I pushed it towards the staircase, heard its clang behind me as took the first few steps, felt the ceiling low over my head. The smell of cooked apples and butter greeted me upstairs at her door.

"*Apfelstreusel*," Susanne explained, pointing to the kitchen where a crumble cake lay cooling on a rack. "Please, sit down," she urged.

The dining table, next to a window where sunshine was streaming its gold, was already laid. Cake plates had been set with small forks sticking up from napkins at jaunty angles. I sat with my back to the sun that illuminated my edges and must have turned me, from Susanne's side, into a silhouette. She returned with the cake and a pressurised canister of cream. A ginger cat padded over to my feet, where it considered me with a clockwise rotation of his head. Susanne brought the teapot, placed it on its mat on the table and picked up the cat, stroking it in her arms. It began to purr.

"I hope I can find the right words so there are no misunderstandings," she said, sitting down and pouring tea, gurgling and steaming, into our cups. My teaspoon chimed against the saucer. Susanne sipped her tea and I heard it travel down her throat. The

hands of the clock on her wall seemed to move more slowly than usual. The cat chose a spot in a puddle of sunlight at my feet.

“The point is sometimes there are two different things: what you tell people outside and what you really feel. I think I am now at the age where I have nothing to lose!” She chortled.

“I have no career where if I say something which is not politically correct,” she interrupted herself again with her own vibrato laughter, “that I lose my job or something.”

Her hands moved to her throat, touching the black and white pattern of her scarf with her fingers.

“Sometimes I have the feeling that people cannot really be honest here in Germany. If you say something critical, people make you die. They just ignore you. If you say as a Jew something they don’t like to hear, they say you are a *Nestbeschmutzer* or they say you are a self-hater, you hate yourself as a Jew.”

“Who says that?” I asked. “The Germans say that or the Jews?”

“The Jews,” she replied.

She touched her face. Gestured to her nose.

“The point is that Jewish people tend to think that non-Jewish people will like it.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“Let’s say, just as an example, in the debate over the circumcision, let’s say there is a Jew who says ‘Yes, I agree, we don’t need it.’ They think the non-Jewish people would love it, those who are against circumcision. You see?”

She pounded the table with her right hand so that her wedding ring clunked, gold against timber, and went on.

“For every opinion, you will find a Jew who is not of the opinion of the mainstream. And because of my own experience here in Germany, sometimes I have another opinion than other Jews. And sometimes I did not dare to say it.” Her cadence rose and fell. “Because I knew if I would say it,” she sighed, opening her palms as though she had played her last card. “I would lose my friends.”

And then she told me that she didn’t think Jewish boys must be circumcised.

“I would always defend that we should have circumcision, that it is not forbidden or that people are not punished because of it,” she clarified. “This is one side.”

“But on the other side I think: ‘What are you so upset about?’ Even if we make the circumcision, we should discuss it, among Jews. Why is it so essential? The child of a Jewish mother is Jewish. *Punkt.”* She clapped her hands together to emphasise the full stop.

“And then if his spirit is Jewish, if his values are Jewish, if he is dealing with life as a Jew and is good to other people, then this is Jewish, and not because someone is circumcised! This is everything that one needs to have as a Jew!”

“And what about the girls?” I prompted.

“Ja!” she shouted, standing up so that the teacups danced on their saucers.

“This is the first question I asked the rabbi. I said, ‘Why is it so exciting?’ I said, ‘I have always had a *Bris* [covenant] with God and I am not circumcised!’” She smiled warmly.

“And so I didn’t really understand all this excitement about it.”

She sat down again and set her cup back into its housing. “I understand and I accept that Charlotte Knobloch has her own feelings, but I also want to be accepted with my feelings, you know?”

I took a bite of cake and considered the woman I faced across her dining table. I carried a vessel I hadn’t known I owned, that of the insider/outsider; the amnesty of the

confidant/stranger into which she could pour her innermost thoughts without fear. She, in return, held a mirror to me.

“I found Michael Wolffsohn made a very good commentary in the newspaper *Die Welt*,” Susanne went on.

“I liked this very much. He said one thing I especially remember: that the main thing is not the little bit of physical stuff [the foreskin] that we should circumcise but in the prophets it says that we should circumcise our hearts, and that as Jews we should have something of our spirit; a spiritual Judaism. It's not only because we are circumcised that we are Jews; we are Jews because we have our values. And this is also my opinion.”

Afterwards, I looked up the article Susanne had referred to. On August 28, 2012, *Die Welt* had published an opinion piece by Wolffsohn, a well-known history professor, entitled: *Nicht die Beschneidung macht den Juden*.

In it, Wolffsohn wrote that,

“The Torah reveals in several places that circumcision of boys has always been controversial. The custom was probably even replaced by the ritual of baptism for some time. Judaism does not depend on the foreskin. The *Halacha*, the Jewish religious law, is clear: Any uncircumcised Jew is a Jew if he is the son of a Jewish mother.”

* Name has been changed.

Chapter Fifteen

I handed Raphael Seligmann a sheet of A4, steadying my hand as I reached across his desk. On it was printed a consent form designed to ensure he would not come to harm via the process of talking to me. On his desk a pear-shaped lightbulb shone under the emerald canopy of a classical brass desk lamp. He pulled the paper under its orbit in a way that made me wonder if he might renege on our discussion. His was what is called a household name, the product of his career as a journalist, commentator and author of novels that since the late 1980s had slipped under the surface of what it might mean to

be Jewish in Germany. Not in the terms marked for generalised consumption, but in the nuances of private iterations, where Jews in Germany, or German Jews, as he would have it, could be seen to be just like other human beings, only with the trauma of the Holocaust in their proximity; their perpetual shadows.

Now he had turned his gaze outwards, abroad. His focus was the United States, as far as I could tell, where cynicism about Jews living in “the land of the perpetrators” was felt to be most damnatory. It could just as well have been set towards anywhere somebody might wish to read a German newspaper in English extolling the resurgence of Jewish life there like a paperboy with his own product rolled up as megaphone. *Jewish Voice* From *Germany.* That preposition seemed to contain his paper’s target, although later it appeared as a quarterly supplement in a German daily.

I watched Seligmann, a man born two years after the war to his German parents in Israel, where they had escaped in time to survive the Holocaust. His pen hovered. A few soft grey hairs covered the sides and the top of his head. Under a faded leather jacket he wore a white business shirt. At last his pen moved, not towards the signature line but to the working title of the project, the first few words of which were in German. Through his rimless spectacles, Seligmann began to copyedit, slashing at my capitals. Twenty years earlier, when I had started out as a journalist, green-visored men had done the same. I laughed.

“It should have small letters,” he insisted.

I explained that in English headings, apart from prepositions, the first letter of each word is capitalised.

“In German,” he countered, “it’s independent.”

I blushed and suggested we begin.

“Yes,” he replied, signing the form and offering me the first of many warm, impatient grins.

I wanted to know about the editorial he had written in the first issue of his newspaper a few months previously. He had referred to a “rebirth”, a term I had found to have set the

teeth on edge of a few Jews I had met in Germany. How did he think this resurrection would be possible?

“With time, with people, with goodwill, and with the will to achieve,” he replied.

“In my eyes it’s not enough to have a standstill of Jewish identity based only on a Holocaust identity. Jewish-German reconciliation depends also on a vivid Jewish community with knowledge about their religious, cultural, traditional roots. And from the German side, to take into consideration that Jews are living personalities.”

I was reminded of a comment he’d made in an interview, that he didn’t want Hitler to have the last word. His newspaper was one answer to that. Was living in Germany as a Jew, an idea that beckoned me even as I asked the question, another compelling response?

“Living here, taking part, yes.”

His eyes turned dreamy. He took off his jacket and hung it over the back of his timber desk chair, with its red upholstery. His shirt was crisp, enfolded around his compact frame like origami.

“Living here is OK,” he mused.

His gaze slid off mine to a glass tank on the floor beside where I sat, close to one of a few doors that led in and out of his home office in this typical Berlin *Altbau* front building with its grand “representative” chambers.

“Also my turtles are living here,” he added.

He appraised them with affection, their extremities still tucked under their shells. I had met his dog at the front door, a chocolate Labrador who licked my bare legs in greeting and seemed, inexplicably, to be called Chanel. I searched Seligmann’s pale eyes and tried to steer them back to the topic. Picking up his optimism, I suggested the circumcision debate might be reframed as an opportunity to educate Germans about Jewish customs.

“Every crisis is an opportunity!” he chuckled, but then he turned sombre.

“I have to confess that some sounds, some background music to the debate is at least ignorance, if not old anti-Semitic stereotypes. It’s also in my eyes an indicator of a godless society. Not only Jewish but also Christian. Because if you neglect God, if you say there is no God, then human wellbeing is the new God, and then okay, why do it? It’s hard, it hurts and whatever. Neglecting objective health, because the WHO [World Health
Organisation] says you should do male circumcision because of HIV and so on.”

He tapped the table. “And the second thing is that it’s freedom of religion. It’s not that the Muslims and the Jews try to circumcise other children. It’s an expression and it’s a part of religious Jewish identity.”

“But do you think that’s widely understood here?” I queried.

I mentioned Charlotte Knobloch’s editorial, “Does Germany still really want us?”

“Look, that’s not my approach,” Seligmann flicked his fingers at some invisible dust.

“Because it’s not a question of if the gentiles like us or not. We are part of German society. It’s like in a normal relationship. If we’re married and I ask you every day, ‘Do you love me?’ you’ll get mad. And so I think we should just pronounce our interests, like the Catholics, like the Muslims, like the gays, like the heteros …” He tapped the table to emphasise each group.

“But what she’s right about,” he observed, “is that in the discussion, in the furious discussion, I noticed some remarks that showed that some of the people have the old stereotypes. And that’s frightening. The only way to combat it is to repeat our position.”

He paused. “We are not alone. It’s not only a Jewish standpoint against the whole of society; it’s 40 to 60, or 45 to 55, part of it is in favour, part is against.”

These were different to the figures of 75 per cent against that Stephan had quoted to me. I looked behind Seligmann to his study windows, which faced the street, trying to conjure this society, wondering what these percentages, up or down, could be taken to mean.

My eyes drew back to the bookshelves that lined the walls of his office wherever there were no windows or doors. On one shelf I saw the word “Hitler” on a spine. Then another. And another. Hitler. Hitler. Hitler. I counted nine Hitlers and swung my head towards another rung, hoping for respite. I was rewarded. A hardback was turned to face outwards so that its front cover was exposed. On it, in large typeface, was a single word in magnified font: “Hope”.

I was reminded of a discussion I’d had with three Jews a bit younger and older than me, one each from Germany, America and “Russia”. Seligmann’s new newspaper had come up during our chat.

“He is an example of the German Jew who is nostalgic,” one of them had told me. “He’s focused on an idealised intellectual salon world that doesn’t exist anymore, or if it does it’s just a remnant.”

Another had commented: “In the non-Jewish community they are very happy about Mr Seligmann, because he tells them what they want to hear. He fits a certain stereotype that some Germans have about Jews.”

“I’ve never felt comfortable with his promotion of the notion of the German-Jewish revival,” said the third. “It just gets to me. What is this elite idea, that somehow that’s all that’s missing? That you just have to replace it and everything’s fine?

“Maybe I’m not being fair, but if I asked him, ‘You know, we have 80 per cent Russianspeaking Jews in the community now. Can you build a new glorious German Jewry from that?’ He’ll probably say, ‘Of course’.

“But I think he’s upset that so many Jews still ask the question, ‘How could you stay in Germany?’ I think he wants his newspaper to be an answer to that.”

As diplomatically as I could, I put some of these concerns to Seligmann. Could he understand why some people might be cynical?

“To be cynical is a very simple position,” he replied.

“I believe in the Jewish mind, because of our tradition of knowledge and intellectuality. You can’t live in a vacuum, so when you live here you are reading, you are part of the society, and one day sooner or later you take part in the intellectual discussion. You can’t live in a place only to make money. You have your social network and piece by piece you are part of the society, of the Jewish German society. I respect every young guy who says, ‘OK this is not my country; what happened was unimaginable and today you also see the anti-Semitism, so I’ll leave this country’. It’s OK, go to America, Australia, Israel, wherever.”

His voice took on a stern tone. “But if you stay here, you will have to make peace with the society.” He laid his hands on the table. “If not, you can’t exist.”

The sound of the turtles turned my head. They had woken up and begun to dig around, scratching against the glass. One of them was making its way out of its vitrine down the ramp and onto the parquetry, which it began to traverse, tracing the beginning of a slow arc around me.

“Do you think it’s important that Jews live in Germany for … well, for any reason?” I asked.

“For a few reasons!” He leaned forward.

“First of all, Germany, not the country but the space of German-speakers including Austria, was one of the most important countries for Jewishness since a thousand years. Look at the Yiddish they spoke in Odessa and so on, that’s German. And from Moses Mendelssohn, Einstein, women and men, the *Judenstaat* was written in German. Herzl spoke German. So it’s a very important country.”

He inhaled. “Also in the negative sense. The modern trauma of the Jewish history is in Germany. And it’s not like after the Inquisition, 500 years without Jewish life. There are Jews here, and if there are Jews, then there is a need – not for most Germans, but from the official Germany, and from a lot of Germans there is a goodwill too – that there are Jews. So take the water and the spices and make a soup. A Jewish-German soup.” I laughed with him.

The turtle was inching up the ramp, back into its glass cage. It was a routine that, from the look of it, it must have performed many times before. My eyes followed Seligmann as he left me to fetch some food for his pets. What was he carrying under his shell? Was he trying to convey the past into the present so that he could reanimate it, even though, according to those critics of his who wished to remain unnamed had suggested to me, echoing Konrad Kwiet, it was certifiably dead?

When Seligmann returned I led him back into the past, his own.

“You arrived in Germany back in 1957…”

“Not voluntarily. My parents returned to Germany. In Israel, my father didn’t learn enough Hebrew; he didn’t have the pioneer mentality, so we returned. I was 10. I was hijacked!” He laughed at this.

“My father belonged to an old Jewish family from a small town in Bavaria that before the war had been 40 per cent Jewish. In the 16th century they even printed a *Talmud* there. There’s a beautiful Jewish cemetery. But in 1938 or ’39 the Jewish community was destroyed. There is no more Jewish community there. There is a museum now, a Jewish museum.

“You didn’t like it very much here…” I prompted.

“No. First of all I was illiterate. I spoke German, because my parents spoke German at home, but I didn’t read and write. And it was cold, I felt like an Australian coming to the German winter!” He chuckled again.

“And it was a very serious society. Not like in Israel where for example we spoke to our teachers with first names and it was unthinkable that the teachers beat children. Here teachers beat children with a stick and it was all very harsh. So I had the idea and the will to return to Israel.

“When I was 18 I tried to volunteer for the Israeli army but my parents blackmailed me: ‘You have to stay with us, don’t leave us alone with all the Germans, with all the antisemites, all the Nazis and so on.”

He spoke in a slow, methodical English inflected with his fluency in German and Hebrew. His hands, sometimes between us, sometimes touching his forehead, conjured sentiments beyond his words. The combination coloured his language in much the same way as Yiddish can do. I heard the sounds of the grandparents' generation around whom I grew up; the "th's" getting caught on the tip of the tongue behind the front teeth so that they came out as "szsz"; the "r's" rolling from the back of the throat like the wrapped kosher sweets my *Buba* kept in a pewter dish on her hall table; their loud crinkly wrappers hiding soft centres that crunched and dissolved.

"Then I fell in love with a German," he continued, rolling up his sleeves so I could see the golden hairs on his forearms.

"Her parents told her that love with a Jew was a *Blutschande*, a blood-shame. It was Nazi terminology." He winced.

"But we were in love. My parents said she was a *shiksa* (gentile woman) and that her parents used Nazi language and thinking."

He shrugged. "We were together for eight years and then I finished my studies. I wanted to leave the country, not to be 'the Jew'. I always was a Jew, but what I wanted was not to be the Jew in a minority. I spent one year in Tel Aviv. My professors asked me to write about the Final Solution. And I said no. 'It's not my business'. And then I thought, 'One moment, I'll write about the active Jews'. So I wrote about Israeli security policy. The active Jews. Not the passive Jews."

"You've spent the rest of your life writing about the active Jews, would you say?"

He nodded slowly. "It's a good interpretation. First of all I wrote, I was active by writing it. I was the first in western Germany who wrote contemporary Jewish novels. Sander Gilman wrote that my first novel was a revolution because it was the first to show the feelings of the Jews in Germany. There were hundreds if not thousands of scientific books, nonfiction books, but the novel lives from the feelings; how do the Jews feel? What does it do to you if someone calls you, "dirty Jew", for example? Or if you have a love affair with a gentile woman and her father was a former SS officer.

“We had in Germany journalists, professors of German literature and no-one could discover a Jewish trauma. Maybe they knew about it, but there was nothing, no sign of it expressed in literature. This vacuum didn’t let all the Jews breathe, intellectually, psychologically.

“When I first published a book about Israeli security policy, which doesn’t interest any dog, with no problems I found a publisher. But for this first novel – and I was known because of my articles – for four years I didn’t find a publisher. The publishing houses, they didn’t allow it. And so I published it myself and then I had feedback. It was of potential interest to the public.”

One hand jumped to his forehead. “But on the official level: silence.”

“What’s your interpretation of that, was it because they were afraid to humanise Jews?” I asked.

“Yeah, they had enough and they didn’t want new problems. ‘Jews make problems’.” His palms opened.

“Every human being makes problems. And living Jews…” He trailed off.

“I wanted to take the Jewish victim, it’s a cliché, but I wanted to look behind it. How do the Jews feel? What does a trauma mean?

“And it’s not enough to say ‘We like our Jewish co-citizens; our *Jüdische mitbürgher*.” He pointed his forefinger up to the stucco on the ceiling.

“Not ‘Jewish *citizens*’ but ‘Jewish *co-citizens*’, they say. You say it only with foreigners, with Jews and with elderly persons. In other cases, with farmers, with Catholics, whatever, it’s ‘citizens’ but the Jews are ‘co-citizens’. If you have to pronounce it like that, then that’s the real reason I wrote the books: to give the Jews a voice.”

“What about the question of Jews in Germany or German Jews?” I asked.

I had read the article he had published under that headline in his newspaper, but I was thinking more of how, a few years earlier, he had lobbied unsuccessfully for the Central Council of *Jews in Germany* to become the Central Council of *German Jews*, as it had been before the Holocaust.

“In my eyes, we are German Jews. Full stop. We are not Jews in Germany. A Jew in Germany is like you; you visit Germany, or an Israeli tourist. I think it’s a self-delusion if we say we are Jews in Germany. If you live in Germany all your life, more or less, of course you are a German Jew.”

Now I came to the crux of what I was trying to understand.

“When you live in Germany as a Jew do you think there must be some form of internal reconciling of your presence here with the past?”

Seligmann stood up and took a few steps towards his bookshelves. He raised his shoulders and dropped them like bags of cement.

“I think if you live here for a long time, you have to find a way of reconciliation. You can’t live all your life in a ghetto, in a psychological jail.” His eyes scanned his shelves of books, then turned back to me.

“If you say, ‘OK, I have my partner and three friends and the rest of the society is not mine’, you can’t live like that. Maybe for one year. If not, you will take harm. Psychological harm.”

He opened his hands and gestured towards me.

“So, if one day you intend to come to Germany, you will have to make, more or less, your peace with this society." He exhaled. "And it’s sometimes very hard.”

He sat down again at his desk. His face showed weariness.

“I was just last week with a broadcasting program.”

He leaned forward on his desk and lowered his voice. “I only went there because the topic was Jewish life, but the whole of Jewish life was reduced to my penis. The Jewish penis. About the circumcision. I felt like I would vomit.”

“And we have to fix it. Maybe I’m idealistic.” He smiled and shrugged. “But I think you can do it.” He sighed, looked at his turtles. “It’s a long process.”

I lifted my eyes and noticed a patch of wall that was free of bookshelves. On it were hung framed photographs and prints. A painting by Hako, ’83, depicting Jews in their glory and pain, reminded me of the three *Stolpersteine* outside the front door to his building that had glinted at me on my way in. I had read the names on the gold plaques that the German artist Gunter Demnig had hammered into the ground so that residents and passersby would stumble over them and be reminded of who had once lived here. All three shared a surname, and the fate of having been deported in early 1943. The plaques of the two men noted that had been murdered in Auschwitz. The woman, whose first name by coincidence was Lucia, had survived Theresienstadt.

Beside the Hako on the bookshelf was an oil painting of orthodox Jews praying in a *Shul*. I turned my thoughts back to Seligmann,

“Would you feel comfortable wearing a *Kippah* on the streets of Berlin?” I asked.

His answer seemed practised. “I don’t do it in Israel, so why should I do it here?”

Between us hung something less abstract, the knowledge that two weeks earlier a rabbi wearing a *Kippah* had been punched in the face and insulted as a Jew by four men “of Arab descent” in Schöneberg, a leafy district in south-west Berlin better known for the KaDeWe department store.

The rabbi had been on his way to synagogue with his six-year-old daughter, whom the men had threatened to kill. The following weekend there had been a demonstration attended by the rabbi, bandaged and bruised, with a few dozen Jews and a few hundred gentile Germans, some of whom were wearing “solidarity” *Kippahs*.

“But should one feel comfortable to do so?” I reframed the question.

“No, I don’t think they should do it,” Seligmann replied, the volume of his voice notably rising.

He paused. “I have to differentiate. I wouldn’t care about doing it here in West Berlin, but in parts where young aggressive Muslims are, it wouldn’t be a good way to take care of my security.”

“So it’s not a sensible thing to do?”

“It’s a special phenomenon of the young Muslims with Jews.”

“Is that the primary threat in terms of anti-Semitism for Jews in Germany now?”

“I don’t think it’s the whole Muslim population,” he shrugged and raised his hands. “It’s less than 10 per cent.”

“Hallo,” The door opened behind me as if it had been prearranged. His wife Elisabeth, through whose gate I had persisted to secure the interview, was there. I stood up to have my hand firmly shaken by a proper, Protestant woman with a sensible grey haircut and quite a few centimetres over her husband. She pointed to her watch. Seligmann made a joke about how she and I had more or less the same name, and said he would give me five more minutes.

I had one last question. It was about *Heimat,* another idea the Nazis had contaminated. It conjured something more than homeland; a place characterised by what the Germans call *Sensucht*, a feeling that can also only be partly captured in English by the word “longing”. Some may have insisted on it being a geographical place but I understood it could take other forms.

Seligmann’s answer rolled out of his mouth as though he had it ready on a conveyer.

“My *Heimat* is the German language and the Jewish belief. I grew up with the German language, with my parents. I write in German, I read in German, I discuss in German, my influences are German.” His fingertips pointed to the centre of his chest.

“But I am Jewish. Jewish to me is not to believe all the commandments, but to believe in the tradition and the history. That’s in first place, that’s my belief. So, I am a German Jew. Those were the last words of my first novel: *Ich bin ein deutsche Jude.”*

I scrawled a reminder in my notebook to check the capitalisation.

With that, Seligmann walked me to the front door. His dog bounded behind us and offered my legs a farewell kiss. Seligmann gently clasped her by the collar. “What was her name? I think I might have misheard it,” I asked him.

“*Schamal*,” he answered. “It’s the Hebrew word for watchdog.”

“Ahh, that makes more sense,” I replied, scratching the fur behind his ears. “But you know she’s far too friendly for that job.”

Chapter Sixteen
December 2012, Sydney

Settled back home in Sydney after our three-month trip, my computer pinged with an alert I’d set up months earlier. I scanned the headline. The crisis in Germany was over. After all those months of anxiety, Angela Merkel had taken things into her hands and, in one fast movement, intervened. Circumcision on religious or cultural grounds was legal in Germany. The Jews could stay.

A few days later I celebrated my 40th birthday at home. At the party, Simon gave what I thought was an impromptu speech. He seemed uncharacteristically nervous. After a few minutes he pulled something out of his pocket and asked me a question I at first failed to grasp. I looked from him to my mum standing in our garden with the rest of our family and friends, her mouth open, her eyes sparkling, and realised I must’ve heard Simon correctly the first time.

Earlier in the year we’d been to the marriage of my stepsister and her husband. The rabbi, even though he was much more religious than ours, had dropped some playful

quips into the ceremony. A trio of musicians had made their instruments whisper and sing. The Israeli dancing started soon afterwards. I watched Simon's face brighten, first as he watched, then as he thrust himself into the spinning crowd, until he was incandescent.

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December 2013, Venice

Exactly a year later, we were married on the other side of the world. The rabbi explained the significance of each of the rituals in a way that made everybody there, Jewish or not, feel at home. She'd been delighted to officiate, even though Simon wasn't Jewish. She beamed when I told her it was he who'd suggested we have a Jewish wedding. As the mists shrouded the floating city in its wintry veil, Samuel held one of the poles of the *Chuppah*, Simon's dad grasped another. My stepfather and stepbrother had hold of the other two, so that the canopy, an antique linen sheet from Simon's *Oma*, billowed above us. Simon and I clasped hands underneath it while my mother and his wrapped cords around them. Lucia poured the *Kiddush* wine into silver cups that we fed to each other. Lotte carried the rings and slipped them into our hands. Milo gave Simon the glass, wrapped in cloth, that he crushed under his foot to the clapping of hands and the cries of: "*Mazel Tov*!"

Afterwards, Simon and I reached out to each other as our guests huddled beneath us, lifting us up on chairs. Back on the ground our *Sehnsucht* spun to the melodies of a violinist I'd heard play back in Sydney and the troupe he'd assembled from his home in Berlin: two Russians on accordion and double bass and Karsten Troyke, one of my mum's favourite Klezmer singers. He fell to his knees and serenaded her with *Tumbalalaika*, his arms outstretched, her hands on her heart. Simon spun me around and around, his smile as wide as I'd ever seen it, his eyes shining unbridled joy. We reached out our hands and everybody surged in to join us, turning in the concentric circles of the *Hora,* the dance that some of them knew and others learned on the spot. Under the transparent roof of a 19th century glasshouse in the city that had built the first Jewish ghetto that was now not much more than a museum, with our arms around each others' shoulders we moved together, backwards and forwards as one.

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June 2014, Sydney

It was a Sunday morning, overcast and bright. The clouds sweated, piercing my temples. Inside the faces were stark in the mid-winter light, lipstick leaking its crimson, aftershave rubbing from cheek to cheek. Strong food, salty and sweet, had been laid out on long tables: Mini bagels *schmeared* with cream cheese and smoked salmon. Hard boiled eggs whipped with mayonnaise and chives into mousse. White fish fried hours ago waiting on cold lettuce leaves. Platters of bright, hard summer fruit, *rugelach* thick with chocolate and hazelnuts. On the front terrace a coffee cart had been set up. A barista made us cappuccinos while we waited for a doctor to clip off Zak's foreskin.

I had never been to a *Bris* before. When Samuel was born, I had learned some of the first lessons of motherhood. My natural birth fantasy was vanquished by a matron with a crochet hook. My mother winked conspiratorially with her first grandchild as she held him in her arms: I wasn't in charge anymore. As I lay in hospital, tender with love for my firstborn, I considered the choice that lay before me. Samuel was named for my mother's father, who had dropped dead of a heart attack at 54 one Melbourne morning, having survived the war as a soldier in the Polish army while much of his family and most of the residents of the town of Mława in central Poland where they had lived had been murdered. While he was on the front, his first wife and young son had been taken to a forest where they had been forced at Nazi gunpoint to line up and undress, moments before they were shot at the edge of a pit, their dead bodies tumbling in with the earth.

Now the long chain of Jewish history beckoned me to it. I drew nearer and examined it carefully. I knew the significance of circumcision on the eighth day of a boy's life. I understood its importance as the mark of tradition, even for those who don't choose to follow *Halachic* interpretations of Judaism. I would have defended the right of Jews to choose to circumcise their sons. I didn't believe it was barbaric. I knew that countless boys of my generation, Jewish or not, had been circumcised. At various times it had been medically advised; at other times evidence had swung the other way. I recognised its wisdom for genital health in biblical times, in trenches, in ghettos, its likely contribution to the improbable survival of the Jewish people.

Would all that suffice?

I knew that, although she respected my wishes, it was the preference of my mother. It would also have been the wish of my father, who had died almost four years before Samuel was born. Their shared sentiment was founded on a single premise: tradition. A piece of my heart cracked, thinking of them, as I decided against that tiny cut that meant so much, and so little.

The living room was full, a sea of excitement that belied my anxiety. For everybody else, this was a celebration, the moment when little Zak, at eight days old, would become a Jew in God's eyes according to the covenant He had made with Abraham five thousand years ago in the Sinai desert.

These thoughts stirred keenly in me. I was familiar with the counter-arguments. Nearly 17 years after Samuel was born, and almost four years after I gave birth to Milo and came to the same conclusion, I levelled them again at myself. Who was I to have resisted that inexorability? My deep wish was for Jewish life and culture to stay alive, yet I had rejected what was deemed by so many to be its most cogent article of faith. I thought of a tidbit in a homespun family history about my father's great-grandmother Fanny, renowned for stretching a stew to feed everybody in 1890s Melbourne no matter how many turned up to *Shabbas* dinner. The story bespoke her ingenuity, her generosity. I wondered if it challenged mine. How far could I water down my soup before it lost its taste? By abstaining, didn't I expect others to do the hard yards while I privileged myself as exempt? And yet, I countered, if I had to make the choice again now, would I make it differently?

I sensed my stepsister's apprehension. I heard the cluck-clucking in the room, that it was only a little thing, all the men had been through it, these days the device wasn't a ceremonial knife but a plastic clip that did the work with absolute precision. It couldn't go wrong. I went into the kitchen for a glass of water. Zak's paternal grandmother was there, an Israeli woman of effusive spirit and shape.

Wasn't I excited about the *Bris*? she exclaimed rhetorically. Didn't I remember what it was like for my two boys? I replied carefully that I didn't. I explained why. Her features crumpled.

“Ah,” she replied at last, as though perceiving my type, with another rhetorical question. “You don’t vaccinate your children, either?”

I opened my mouth to contradict her, but she had already left me.

The hubbub in the living room rose and sharply fell. I elbowed my way into a viewing position. On a walnut dining chair on his grandfather’s lap lay the baby, covered to his chin in a blue surgical gown.

The atmosphere was charged like in the moments before applause. The rabbi from my stepsister’s wedding sang the prayers, the syllables buzzing through his ginger beard. Zak’s father recited his part in the fluent Hebrew of his childhood. The doctor, a family friend, held the plastic implement in his hands. My stepfather wore the shy glow of pride. Tears shrouded my eyes. There was a small click, no more than a whimper from the baby, then the room exploded into cries of “*Mazel Tov*!”, and it was done.

PART THREE

Chapter Seventeen
Summer 2014, St Paul’s College,
University of Sydney

“But they’re not Germans!”

By now the audience was snaking from the chairs to the walls all the way out the door so that some of them were standing on the quadrangle. More people were arriving by the minute from other, larger rooms where conference papers were being concurrently presented by international speakers. I’d already noticed the man facing me from the fourth row. He’d crossed and uncrossed his legs so many times I’d begun to wonder if he was timing each swivel of his limbs to coincide with the clicks of my presentation slides. Now he stood up and pointed a long finger at the screen where I was showing a

clip of the annual anti-Israel Al Qud's Day rally in Berlin, at which protestors were shouting Nazistic slogans.

I looked up from my notes and surveyed the room. All eyes were on the screen behind me. The clip continued.

"Jew, Jew, cowardly pig, come out and fight!" chanted the crowd in German on a Berlin street that I found out later was close to the Ku'Damm, a key site of *Kristallnacht*. It was one of the taunts the Nazis had used on Jews in the 1930s and 40s before "deporting" and most often murdering them. But this wasn't wartime. It was 2014.

"Hamas, Hamas, *Juden ins Gas*", the crowd cried. Jews in the gas.

"They're in Germany, speaking German," I countered.

The long-legged man was still standing.

"But they're not Germans," he repeated, thrusting his forefinger. He turned to the audience to repeat his assertion. "*Das sind keine Deutschen.*"

The clip had finished. The still from the final frame was now paused on the screen. I turned back to it, an invitation to the audience to do the same. The image showed a crowd, some of them wearing the black and white *Keffiyeh* that denotes support for Palestinians around their heads and necks. Quite a few had olive skin, dark hair, "middle eastern" features. Others, fewer in number, were as pale and fair as the man pointing his finger. The subject of the conference was "The Self and The Other". My talk was about examples of, and responses to the "othering" of Jews in Germany.

I'd cited three events: the Al Qud's Day rally in July that had coincided with heightened Israeli-Palestinian unrest; the circumcision debate of 2012; and an exhibition held in 2013 at the state-controlled Jewish Museum in Berlin that was called, "The Whole Truth: Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Jews…" Its centrepiece was an exhibit for which the press had created a loaded shorthand: "Jew In The Box". It consisted of an open-sided vitrine framed by the words, "Are there still Jews in Germany?"

A selection of Jewish volunteers sat in it alone for a couple of hours each day answering unscripted questions put to them by museum visitors.

I had read to the crowd quotes from Miriam Widman, a journalist who'd sat in the "box":

"I've lived on and off in Germany since 1987," Miriam said, "and have often felt like a museum exhibit myself. I have almost without exception been the first Jewish person that any of my German friends and acquaintances have met … And I'm talking about educated people, people with university degrees and all sorts of titles.

"I don't blame Germans for their ignorance. Despite all the hype about the rebirth of Jewish communities in Germany and the influx of Israelis to Berlin, Germany ... is home to a minuscule population of Jews.

"For the most part Jewish communities in Germany are not very open to non-Jews. And Germans, with their Holocaust guilt, are often too uncomfortable or afraid to visit a synagogue or Jewish institution.

"If there aren't many Jews around, meeting one in a box in a museum is better than not having any contact at all."
Not everybody saw it that way. One of the more irascible reproofs came from Stephan Kramer, the general secretary of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, whom I'd interviewed the previous year at Rosh Hashanah in Berlin and who had since left to take on a post as the first Jewish head of the German Secret Service since World War II.

"Why don't they give him a banana and a glass of water, turn up the heat and make the Jew feel really cosy in his glass box?" he'd demanded.

The international press lapped up the story, picking up on the exhibit's visual register, whose echoes of the glass box in which the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann sat during his 1961 trial in Jerusalem were striking.

Of the three events, it was the footage of the Al Qud's Day rally that touched the most sensitive nerve.

Afterwards, the man from the fourth row jumped a queue of conference attendees and other speakers waiting to give me their verdicts. He pushed through them, his finger still stabbing, now inches from my face.
“I’ve written two books about anti-Semitism!” he insisted, as though that would finally persuade me.

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January 2016, Berlin

“In the summer of 2014…” began Greg, “I came out of my store on the Kurfürstendamm and I saw a demonstration with people yelling, ‘Kill the Jews’, ‘Gas the Jews’.” His dark eyes were aflame.

“When I came to Germany 24 years ago, some of my family in America said, ‘How can you go and live in Germany? It's not possible for a Jew to want to live in Germany’.

“After living here a couple of years I always explained to them, ‘Listen, it’s changed. It’s more friendly, more liberal, it’s becoming multicultural. Berlin is becoming a metropolitan city and it has a bright future.

“Then all these years later, I was leaving my shop, I was walking along and that’s when I ran into these people screaming…

“It was on the Ku’damm,” his wife Béa interjected.

“... and I'm like, ‘What the hell?’” Greg continued. “You know, this is serious. The police right next to them, marching along with them. You can’t believe your eyes. You think you’re watching a movie or something.

“You would think that you would see a retaliation or some booing.” He held up his hands as if to wash them from the story he was telling. “I was explicitly watching the reaction of people.

“People were watching, but nobody was saying anything. And you were thinking, ‘Okay this is the 1930s again. People are shutting their mouths and watching as terrible things happen’.”

Less than an hour ago I’d been on the Ku’Damm. I’d seen the bus as I rose from the underground steps and made a run for it. When I got there, the yellow double-decker hadn’t yet left. I stood before its electric doors, panting, and watched them close in my face. On my walk to the next stop, a felt fedora, chestnut brown, caught my eye in a shop that looked as if it had sold hats for longer than anyone could remember. It fitted my head like it was made for it. I bought it, jumped on the next bus, and made my way to Béa and Greg’s.

I had met Béa in 2012 in her office at the Central Council of Jews in Germany, a narrow grey room bisected by a small desk, where she worked part-time. The rest of the week she ran an events agency. She was the granddaughter of Jekkes, pre-war German Jews.

“My grandparents on my mother’s side always lived in Berlin,” she had told me. “My grandmother was an actress. My grandfather was a brewery owner and a lawyer.

“Just before the war started, they went to the States, to see if it might be a chance to emigrate. They came back because they found in the States that the Americans were treating the blacks much like the Germans were treating the Jews, ‘No blacks sitting here or there, no blacks on this bus’, and so they thought, ‘No, that’s not a place to go to’. And they came back.

She inhaled.

“And right after that, they left Berlin. They had to escape. They went to Holland. My mother and my uncle had to follow in a Kindertransport.

“After two years they were deported to the Westerbork concentration camp, but they were very lucky. They were Calmeyerjuden. My grandmother found out that Hans Calmeyer would tell you what kinds of papers he needed to prove that you were German and not Jewish.

“So my grandmother got her mother, who wasn’t Jewish, to send her papers to say that she was not the daughter of her father, but of somebody else who already died. Calmeyer even picked up in person, my mother and my uncle, my grandmother and grandfather from Westerbork to bring them out. My grandmother, with the green eyes, the blonde hair, looked like the perfect example of an Aryan.”

I looked into Bea’s deep brown eyes, at her olive skin framed by thick chestnut hair that she had pulled back from her oval face into a generous bun. From her grandmother she had inherited high cheekbones and a charisma that was projected in her voice and eyes. Together they drew me into stories she could conjure with just a few words.

Her grandparents lived until the end of the war in Holland, then returned to their apartment in Berlin.

“All the neighbours already took all their stuff and there were people living in their apartment. And they were like, “You – out!” They went to their neighbours to try to collect their stuff.

“But they never became members of the Jewish community again because after the war it was not modern anymore. That was not their understanding of being Jewish.”

She clasped her hands. The late afternoon light from the window behind me struck the rings on her long, elegant fingers. One of them was shaped as a gecko with tiny diamonds for eyes, hoping to catch some sun on his back.

“Then there’s a big gap when being Jewish was not really a big matter in the family,” she picked up the threads. “Until I was born and my mother was thinking about how to bring me up.

“She got in contact with some Jewish women in Berlin, who we are still in contact with, and they arranged that I would go to the Jewish kindergarten. This is how it started again.”

Did she ever explain to you why she made that decision?

“Well, I was born in ’72. Kids could run around, do whatever they wanted, no rules. My mother was not really a friend of that concept so she was looking for a kindergarten with a structured concept where the teachers would be involved in our education, our behaviour.

“We were not many in that group, maybe 12 of us. And I am still friends with most of them.”

Tiny creases at the corners of her eyes crinkled with her smile.

“So my mum was really putting the pieces together and she was very happy to bring out her roots and combine them with a modern way of being Jewish. We never celebrated any holidays, but we were all very proud of being Jewish.

“We always celebrated Christmas and Easter,” she added.

So you had a Christmas tree? I wondered aloud.

“Yeah, that’s the way they had it before the war. All the Jews had trees, and the *Channukkiah* as well,” Béa’s eyes moved to meet mine. “That part we left behind.”

She smiled wistfully, thinking, I supposed of her mum, who had died years before.
“But then when I got engaged – my husband is American-Jewish – she was so happy. I couldn’t believe it. She started to really like the idea.” Her eyes crinkled again. “Really.

“For our wedding she came up with the *Tallis* from my grandfather. She found something in a drawer, a black purse, velvet, with a Star of David on it and a number. It was the date of my grandfather’s Bar Mitzvah.

“It just says how important the religion is. You don’t celebrate the festivals but some things are so important to you that you hold onto them. Deep inside they were truly Jewish.

“So for our wedding we got this as a present, to pass it on to our son for his *Bar Mitzvah*.”

How do you feel about being German and Jewish? I asked.

“My German identity is very established and being Jewish was always a part of that,” she replied firmly. Her hands lay before her on the desk, absolutely still. “I never questioned that if I am Jewish I cannot be a German. For me it always fit together. I never had to choose.”

The fibres of her lilac sweater caught the light. She rapped her knuckles on the desk.

“It doesn’t make me less Jewish because I’m German, and it doesn’t make me a bad Jew just because I also have a Christmas tree.” Her smile winked at me.

“This really is the big difference between my husband and I.

“For him it’s really The. Worst. Thing. You. Can. Do. is to have a Christmas tree. I think he even thinks you will get punished for it.” She laughed generously. “It’s his worst nightmare.

“My husband is not orthodox, but some things have been a certain way for many generations. It’s a very different understanding of how to be Jewish.”

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January 2016, Berlin

Béa and Greg had already had dinner by the time I arrived. The table has been cleared, except for a pot of fresh peppermint tea sitting on a stand over a tea light and some glass bowls filled with dried fruit, nuts and almond meal cake with rosy patches of stewed plums that Béa had cut into large cubes.

“Do you remember how you felt when you first came here?” I asked Greg.

“Yeah, it was very cold.” We laughed.

“Do you mean the emotional or the physical temperature?” I asked with a half-smile.

“Emotionally, very, very cold,” said Greg, his voice turning sombre before it sprang back to life.

“At that time Berlin was still a very small city. Then you started to see more and more people coming from abroad. New streets were opening up every day. You saw a city being built inside a city. There was a lot of energy. It felt good to be here. I was very proud to live here.

“You saw a bright future for everything. That was the reason why I wanted to have my children here, why I got married here. You saw change, definitely for the better.

“What changed?” I asked.

“It changed in 2014.” He rubbed his forehead with his palm. “Back in the summer of that year is when everything changed.

“That gave me chills. I'd never felt like that before in my life. I've never felt so threatened.

“I’m a pretty proud person. I’ve always considered myself very strong and I’ve never felt so weak and so small like I did in that moment. I couldn’t believe what I saw, what I heard and what was happening in the streets of a modern city. That’s probably going to stay with me my whole life.”

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After our meeting in 2012 Béa had given me the number of Inge, an 89-year-old friend who had survived the Holocaust with false papers in and around Berlin, while her parents, the rest of her family and all of her friends had been murdered.
Inge had invited me over to her apartment in August of that year, a couple of months before her 90th birthday. At the end of the war, she was 22, alone. She needed to work. She learned to sew and cut patterns, and she found she had talent. She became a “star” fashion designer. “*Ingeborg Modele*”, her label was called, she told me proudly.

Her apartment in a villa in Grünewald, a suburb of Berlin I recognised from Lion Feuchtwanger’s 1934 book *The Oppermanns*, was, as she put it, “like in Hollywood” with its plush carpet and sofas, its walls lined with art. She wore a white collared shirt under her blonde bob, with a black and grey woollen vest and matching scarf. Hanging over her heart were two strands, a single pearl on a chain and a long string of pearls.

She had grown up in the heart of the community, on a west Berlin street that ran off the Ku’Damm.

On the day of 10 November,1938 she was at home.

“My parents didn’t want me to go to school,” she recalled. “I didn’t know why. So I asked if I could visit a girlfriend. I stepped down from our building and I walked to the Kurfurstendamm and I came to the next corner, Markgraf-Albrechtstrasse. There was our synagogue. It was burned.

“A lot of German people were standing in front of it. There was no crying, laughter, nothing, not a single word, not a warm word, nothing.” Tears, magnified behind her glasses, spilled from her eyes.

“My synagogue, my second home, burnt.”

She pulled a handkerchief from her sleeve and wiped her eyes.

“There was a restaurant on the first floor, it was Jewish, I saw how chairs, lamps, tables had come through the windows to the street, and all these people stood there, doing nothing. You can’t believe this.

“This was my day in 1938. The 10th of November. The brother of my mother came on this day to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Only a few years later, my parents were taken to Auschwitz.”

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“I read that Inge passed away.” I looked at Béa.

She nodded. The three of us sat silently.

“She had a wonderful 90th birthday celebration. A big dinner with her friends and a little party with dancing. She really enjoyed it very much.

“She was much liked also,” Greg added. He looked up.

“There’s a big question about what happens now that almost all the survivors are gone,” he said. “Who is going to be fighting still to hear those voices?

“Yes, it's very powerful to hear testimony from somebody who was there,” I responded. “All the archives are really important but it’s not the same as when you actually stand beside someone…”

I looked up the pair of faces and recognised my thoughts in theirs.
“When you hold their hand…”

Chapter Eighteen
Late January 2016, Munich

The bus exhaled and lurched deeper into the suburbs. The other alighting passengers vanished along white pavements. I spun around, my hands outstretched to catch the falling snowflakes. A quartet of pale buildings were fixed on the intersection’s corners. Sturdy and pitch-roofed, each managed to approximate the style of their pre-war antecedents, streamlining the details into no more than what was now required. In the distance I could hear faint sounds of life. Here, nothing. I held out my phone, willing its blue dot to move to the right place on its glowing map. It replied by hovering up and down on the spot.

My coat was beginning to turn white. At last, an old man, smaller than me, stepped out of a hatchback driven by his departing wife. Head bent, he shuffled along. My boots sank into clouds of fallen snow as I stormed towards a back doorway I would never have found without him. He pulled out his *Kippah*, pinned it to his hair, turned to me as though he’d known all along and offered,

“*Shabbat Shalom.*”

His gentle eyes took in mine. Inside, I followed him into a lift. He produced a shaky finger with which he clicked a small button beside my hip. I felt the hydraulics kick in and we slowly rose. A ponytailed woman with eyes like silver bullets jumped up from her plastic chair and in a single motion pulled me after him into her small ante-room, closing the door behind us. She took a bunch of keys from her hip, eased them into a series of locks,

then gestured the old man through a door and beyond. After producing some answers and my passport, a photocopy of which I had sent in advance before being given the address, I was allowed to follow.

The rabbi, a fine-boned, auburn-headed gentleman from Prague not much older than me, turned and smiled. A woman I had never met looked up and mouthed “Hallo, Lisa,” without moving her folded arms from under her voluminous chest. Instead of rows of pews, the congregants sat around three long tables laid out in parallel in a space that could as easily have housed computers on desks. A handful of chairs were empty. I took the closest one. From the seat beside me came a lilting soprano, sweet and pure as a nightingale.

The song drew to a close and everybody joined in for the attenuated “*Ah-ah-men*”, the cantor’s voice harmonising the “*Ah”* so that, although the room was full and warm, my arms broke out in goosebumps. The rabbi, alternating between his charming English and German, suggested we introduce ourselves as part of this “*Kabbalat Shabbat*”, a service held a few times a year to introduce new members to the fray, and to explicate aspects they might find unfamiliar.

“We make like around and ‘round and everyone says their name, the place of their birth, and how long they have been in *Beth Shalom*,” he suggested.

Voices high and low, young and old, rang out loudly and softly. Some had only been here a few months or years. Others had been coming for decades. Places of origin flew out like a spinning globe: Munich, Belorussia, Munich, Pennsylvania, Hamburg, Paris, Munich, Sao Paolo, Sydney, Colorado Springs, Berlin, Romania, Belgrade, Ingolstadt, Munich, Kiev, Budapest, Ukraine, Johannesburg, New Jersey, Frankfurt, Munich, Lyon, Krasnodar … Now it was my turn.

“My name is Lisa, I’m from Sydney, and I’ve been here for about 20 minutes,” I quipped.

The rabbi’s eyes moved to mine: “I would like to ask Lisa, who has come here from Australia today,” he turned to me. “If you can stand next to the candles and light them for us.” I walked over to a pair of silver candlesticks, lit the match and felt the warmth from its small flame against my hands as I covered my eyes for the prayer.

I returned to my seat and greeted the sweet-faced, petite brunette in her late 20s sitting next to me. Her name, like mine, was Lisa. She told me she was from Krasnodar, “a village of one million inhabitants” in southern Russia.

“Are there many Jewish people there?” I wondered.

“I’m not sure,” she replied. “A lot of Jews concealed their identity and changed their names.”

Her father was Jewish. Her mother came from Georgia and grew up Russian Orthodox.
“I’m a patrilineal Jew,” she clarified.
“Technically when I came here I wasn’t considered Jewish. I identified as Jewish, I’ve always felt Jewish, but for the community here that wasn’t enough.”

She was obliged to apply for a “status confirmation”, a process less arduous than a full conversion but nonetheless exacting.

“At some point, I had to write a motivation letter, ‘Why do I want to become a Jew?’. I spoke about my Jewish Russian identity, about how I was pinpointed as being Jewish from birth because of my father and my surname, and how denying that identity would be like spitting on my ancestors’ graves. I’ve always felt that continuity. Traces of it were scattered in my family, like the matzo, my dad saying ‘Oy vey’, those kind of things. My grandmother would sing songs in Yiddish.

“I’ve always felt Jewish and I never thought anybody would even question that, even though I knew that according to Halacha you’re supposed to be matrilineal. The first time that it came up was when we decided to get married.

“It was very important for my husband.” She pointed to the man sitting on her other side. He was born in France, she explained, where he grew up in a traditional but not religious Jewish family.

“This ritual of being accepted is important because Judaism is very much about being a member of a community. If the community sees you as being half-and-half, then it doesn’t work.

“At the same time, my French mother-in-law was always saying ‘You need to know who you are, so your kids won’t have a problem’. I didn’t have a problem, but I didn’t want to make any problems for our kids when we have them, so that was an argument that swayed me.”

“The first rabbi we saw was from Israel, he was a Chabbadnik with a long beard and his wife wore a wig. My dad, who grew up under communism and has a secular Jewish identity, was terrified,” she chuckled at the memory.

“My grandmother,” she continued, “was born in 1924 beyond the Pale of Settlement, just after the revolution. You know about the atheist campaign in Russia. Her family survived the pogroms of the late 19th century. Her grandfather was a Rabbi.

“Apart from the bit of Yiddish she remembered, she really had no idea about Judaism, no connection with the Jewish community.”

“It disappeared that quickly?” I mused.

She nodded. “That quickly it disappeared. Although one really important thing for her was to be married to a Jewish man. This was all that remained of the tradition, I guess.”

“And you did,” I replied.

“Yes. And when my dad saw that our wedding was ‘normal’ he was so touched. I have this picture, he’s looking at the Chuppah with his heart in his eyes. The whole process was very emotional for me. I had to sing the Shema Yisrael and I was crying my eyes out. It was this really amazing feeling of claiming our history.”

She turned to face me fully.

“My mother-in-law is very, very anti-German,” she said. “She would never, ever live here.”

“But I feel differently about it. For a long time in Russia, Jews were not allowed to do certain things. I feel liberated from that here.” She smiled, her brown eyes sparkling.

“There is a famous story that Jews tell in Russia: The Soviet Minister of Culture, her name was Fursteva, I think, was talking to a famous British conductor, and she said, ‘We’re not anti-Semitic. Thirty per cent of our orchestra is Jewish’. She turned to the British conductor and asked him, ‘How many Jews do you have in your orchestra?’

“‘I don’t know’, he replied. ‘We don’t count our Jews’.”

We burst into laughter. The pianist struck up again. “*Shabbat Ha Shabbat, Shabbat Yom HaYisroel* followed by *Adon Olam*, and *O’Seh Shalom Bim’romav*. The latter’s emphatic chorus demands hearty clapping. Some of the congregants supplied it.

“There’s a lot of resentment among German Jews that these Russians don’t have any idea about Judaism. That they know nothing. That they’re not even real Jews, because their father is Jewish and not their mother, or their great-grandmother is, or whatever.

“I mean, a lot of these people were persecuted as Jews in Russia, and then they come here, and they’re told, ‘Well you’re not Jewish, by the way’. So, this is a massive cognitive dissonance for people also like me. After my status confirmation I became *Halachically* Jewish, but before that it was, ‘Who said you were Jewish?’ ‘Nobody’. ‘Your father is Jewish’. ‘You’re not Jewish’.

At the buffet I introduced myself to Mark, whose open face and elongated Aussie vowels I recognised from further along the table. We discovered we’d grown up in neighbouring suburbs and celebrated our *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvahs* at the same liberal *Shul*.

His paternal grandmother, who lived until the age of 103, was born and raised here in Munich.

“She grew up in a beautiful apartment in Schwabing,” he began. “She managed to emigrate to Australia in ’38, where she met her husband – my grandfather – who

emigrated from Berlin in ’39, right at the outbreak of the war. He had fought for Germany in World War I and had a lifelong injury.

As he talked he filled up his plate with colourful morsels from the homemade dishes contributed by each of the congregation’s members.

“So,” he continued, raising his eyebrows to emphasise he was leading me somewhere intriguing. “My wife is German. When I met her she was living here in Munich.”

“When she came out to Australia, my grandmother asked her, ‘Where do you live?’ My wife said ‘Schwabing’. ‘Which street?’. My grandmother said and then, ‘Oh that’s funny. What number?’
“My wife said the number and my grandmother leaned forward and said loudly: ‘What?’

“My wife thought, ‘Well she’s 95, maybe she’s lost it, but my grandmother said, ‘It’s on the corner of Schleissheimerstrasse’. She was right. It was the same apartment building.”

I couldn’t think of what to say.

“Yeah, it was the same building,” Mark repeated, adding wryly: “But it was a different floor.”

On my way back to my seat, I passed Sascha*, a chestnut-haired doctor in his late 40s with a square jawed, sober face. His hands were full of plates that he was helping to clear away. Mark had mentioned that he was on the synagogue’s board. He was born and raised here, with German parents and grandparents whom, he stressed, had never left.

I approached and introduced myself. By now I had learned something key to the German language, together with its convoluted grammar. I was beginning to appreciate the uses of being unapologetically direct. Sascha sat down opposite me with an insistence that more interesting stories lay elsewhere. I urged him onwards with questions that grew more reiterative whenever he demurred. “I was born in Germany. My grandparents were totally assimilated,” he said. “They did not consider themselves to be Jewish even well before the war.”

When the Nazis came to power their status changed according to their regulations, not on the basis of self-identification.

“They became Jewish according the state,” he clarified.

“My great-grandparents from my mother’s side were never registered as Jews. They only had problems later when they had to prove that they were Aryans. And this was the moment when it was impossible to prove that. But they had never been registered, so they were not on any lists.”

Later, in the 50s and 60s, he explained, one had to join the orthodox community to be officially counted, the only one recognised by the government. A lot of reform or assimilated Jews simply dropped out entirely.

“My parents, my mother especially, never liked the orthodox community.”

“Were you brought up as a Jew?” I interjected. He swivelled back to face me.

“No, not really. They told me that I’m Jewish, but they didn’t practise at home.”

He leaned in and lowered his voice. “They told me not to tell anybody. My mother always said, ‘Nobody should know, not even the neighbours’. My grandfather always had a suitcase packed in the cellar, ready to leave. I was always told: ‘If you want to know something, you go to the synagogue or you go to Israel, but here, officially, don’t tell anybody’.
That’s how I was raised.”

And yet traces of a richly storied past hung around the house, ghosts that sometimes appeared, then vanished.

“My father’s father or his grandfather, was in the Jewish part of the German army, or the Prussian army in World War I and I can remember he had a *Pesach* plate, a JewishGerman army *Seder* plate. It was a long time ago when I saw it. I don’t even know if it still exists or where it is.” He paused. “There were a lot of very patriotic Jewish Germans.”

His brown eyes were downturned. When he lifted his head I saw he had remembered something familiar to me too.

“These are all stories that I don’t really know. For a long time nobody spoke about it. It only came out in the final years. And at the time when my grandfather did talk about these things, I was not interested. It is only later that you become interested. And then there was nobody any more to ask.”

“Later, my father – especially my father – wanted to go back and find his Jewish identity,” he went on. “He was one of the founders of this community and he began to bring back the traditions to our house. We began to celebrate *Pesach* and *Chanukah* and we went to the synagogue.”
Sascha was 13 or 14 years old. “Of course that’s the age when you try to find your personal identity. When I was 18 I went to Israel. I’m not really very religious but I try to bring the traditions to my kids today. It’s more a feeling than a deep belief.”

Do your kids feel the way you do? I wanted to know.

“Yes. But they are also…” his eyes turned down once more. “My son is 13 years old and he is also more into Jewish identity than into the religion. He has already had problems because of this.”

What problems?

“He got into trouble because he told people that he is Jewish.” He shook his head and recited his own childhood lesson: “You don’t tell people.”

Sascha sighed as he dug out each detail. “It was in a WhatsApp group. Some kids got into the group who weren’t in his school class, and they were making very bad comments about Jews. My son told them to shut up and that they shouldn’t say things like that.

“They asked him: ‘Why are you offended? Why are you so sensitive?’ And he said, ‘Yeah, because I am Jewish’.” Sascha’s jaw clenched. “And then he really got it.”

Some sent messages of solidarity. Others, among them his closest friends, said nothing.

“The next day, one of his friends went with him and told the teacher. They wrote up what had happened and had the conversation blocked. We had a meeting, we invited all of the parents.

“There was only one woman who showed up, with her daughter who had invited these ‘nice guys’ to join the group.” He smiled with his teeth gritted. “This mother was very open. She made her daughter go to everybody and apologise. That was a great thing, because it was a case of a 12-year-old girl who got acquainted with reality really fast. “This woman went with her daughter to Dachau and made her watch *Schindler’s List*.” His eyes showed his approval. “So in the end some people made their kids think about it.”

How did his son feel about it?

“My son was very sad that a lot of the kids didn’t help him, because they thought, ‘Well, it’s not such a big thing, it was just a joke’. And he said, ‘It’s not a joke when they tell me that they will put me in a concentration camp. It’s serious. People were killed for being Jewish not so long ago.’

With the school’s support, Sascha spoke to the police.

“They said, ‘If you give this case to us officially, we will open an investigation and then all the kids will have to come and speak in front of the police, perhaps also in front of a judge. It will be a big thing, but perhaps it will be good to do it.’ He paused. ‘But think about it’, he said.

Sascha took those words back to the kids. “We even spoke with the guy who had said the worst of these things. He apologised. In the end he said it was very wrong and that he didn’t believe what he had said.” He rubbed his forehead with the heel of his hand. “I thought, it doesn’t make sense to put the police around his neck.” His eyes settled softly. “He was just a 15-year-old kid.”

I scanned the room. Most of the men were still wearing their *Kippahs.* I mentioned that I'd heard some rabbis in Germany had been advising against wearing them in public.

"I think this depends very much on where you are in Germany," he replied. "In Munich it's fine. You meet people from the community who walk around here with their *Kippahs* on and they say they never had a problem, but of course that's only one community. I don't know about others.

He threaded his fingers together. "And I also don't know what happens now with a million refugees – of course they have totally different problems – but we will see."
I leaned in. "What do you think about it? From the way it's been reported internationally it seems like the Jewish community is quite split between those who want to help the refugees and those who are afraid they're importing anti-Semitism…?"

"This we will see. We don't know. We took a group of young guys, refugees, to the zoo with young people from this community and it was no problem.

"But on the other side, they come from Syria and Iraq and in those places they are basically anti-Israel, the next step would be anti-Semitism. I think there's a high possibility that it will happen in some cases.

"All the Syrians and the Iraqi people I've had contact with ... I don't tell them I'm Jewish, but I never had any problem with them."

Do you have much contact with them?

"Yes, because I am a doctor and I have quite a lot of patients, and I have done some work in a refugee camp in the suburb where we live. I never had any problems, you only ask yourself sometimes why they are here."

I watched the elderly man who had guided me to the hidden door to the *Shul* as he shuffled towards the cloakroom. Sascha's eyes followed mine.

“A lot of people are afraid. My wife was thinking about taking down the *Mezzuzeh* from our door and I said no. If something will happen we won’t remove the *Mezzuzeh*, we will move away.

“You mean emigrate?” My eyes widened.

“Yes, but I don’t think it will happen. At the moment Germany is one of the best countries in the world for Jewish people. Because of the history, they always look very exactly to determine that nothing happens to Jewish communities. It’s sort of state policy that anti-Semitism can’t happen in Germany again.”

*Name has been changed

Chapter Nineteen
Midwinter, early 2016, Hamburg

A week before we were due to return home to Sydney, I took the train to Hamburg to meet Robert, a 29-year-old filmmaker who moved from Latvia to east Berlin with his parents and brother in 1989. That was the year the German government created a special category of “quota refugees” for Jews from the Soviet Union, when the Berlin Wall fell, and when Robert turned three.

“We arrived just two months before the wall collapsed and we were put there in a *Heim*, a refugee shelter in Oranienburg.

“Everything was very unstable before we left. Perestroika was just in the beginning. Everybody knew there was going to be a change coming soon. Life became really rough in those days. People were concerned about the future, especially for their children.”

And your parents decided to move to Germany? I prodded.

“I asked this question to the older generation. The two cousins of my father, one went to Israel, the other went to New York and we came to Germany. How could it be?

“They said that it was a safe place. Safer than in Russia or in other countries who don’t deal with all these Third Reich things. For example, I don’t think in Italy they made a big effort to work out the Mussolini time.

“Of course there were people saying to my parents, ‘No, I will never make a step into Germany. But the ones who decided to come here, they said ‘I think it will be safer’.

“In the end, it is.”

He read the lines of my next question without me needing to ask it.

“Anti-Semitism is everywhere in the world and you get stupid people everywhere. But I think there’s also a lot of good people everywhere.
“My first kindergarten teacher helped us a lot. First she accepted my brother and me into the kindergarten, then she helped our family find a flat and guided us through the bureaucracy.

“She was from the GDR, so she was far away from the Nazi past – you know because the GDR disconnected themselves from it – but she still helped us.”

He went into the kitchen where one of his flatmates was eating breakfast. When he returned to the living room he handed me an “I love Hamburg” mug and joined me on the vinyl sofa, apologising that he couldn’t offer me biscuits or cake.

“It’s the eastern European hospitality,” he added, smiling warmly. On the wall hung a guitar and a ukulele. It was easy to imagine the instruments in his hands, the room lively with friends.

“My family came from all over the place. My father is from Azerbaijan. Both of his parents were Jewish. There are Ukrainian roots, I think, but the tracks are lost. My mother, she's from Russia, near Moscow. Her father was Jewish. So, there's a lot of Soviet, Jewish mix-up.”

His mother moved to Latvia as a child and became an engineer. His father moved to Riga later, in his 20s, where he worked as a salesman.

“They were not really connected to the Latvian population there. In the Baltic states, there’s still a big segregation between Latvians and Russians. In Riga, it's nearly 50-50.

“So that was one separation. Then there is a big separation between the Jews in the Soviet Union and the Jews from Germany. The Holocaust connects them, but not as much as I thought. My parents knew that Latvia collaborated with the Nazis but they didn’t really associate Latvia with the concentration camps there because of their Russian identity. That made a bigger impression on how they saw these places than the Jewish way.

“But, as Jews, did they still face prejudice there?” I asked.

He turned his head to the window, whose outlook was a suburban street. From the side his jade green irises were translucent in the winter light.

“When people face problems, when everybody loses their stability, it’s easy to blame somebody.”

His hands were laid flat, palms outstretched on his thighs. “And the Jewish people were always blamed.

“My father, he didn’t get certain positions in his job because of the fifth mark in the passport.”

Lisa had told me about the “fifth box” in Russian identification documents when she invited me for coffee at the apartment she shared with her husband in a new part of Munich a few days after the *Shabbat* service at *Beth Shalom*. The box denoted ethnicity, which was a different category to nationality and did not concern religion, which was banned under communism.

“Your ethnicity is supposed to coincide with your nationality,” she had clarified. “So for example a lot of anti-Semitic slurs in Russia are related to the idea that if you’re Jewish then you should just pack your bags and go to Israel. There is even this saying,
“‘*Chimadan* - *Vokzal* - Israel’. ‘Suitcase - train station - Israel’.”

“That classification sounds like racial laws to me,” I remarked, thinking of the ‘J’ stamped into Jewish passports during the Nazi period.

“Yes,” Lisa replied. “It has that connotation to me. It’s pretty much like Nuremberg. In Russia being Jewish is not just a matter of religion or culture, it’s a matter of blood, and I think a lot of people in Russia still have that idea of blood being the decisive factor in this respect.”

She picked up a tray of star-shaped home-baked chocolate biscuits.

“Here, try a *Magen David*,” she urged me.

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In Hamburg a few weeks later Robert was wearing a grey sweater covered in a pattern of lilac flowers nestled against foliage that matched his eyes. His strawberry blonde hair continued from his head down to triangular sideburns and a small moustache.

“After World War Two, the GDR refused to pay reparations to Israel, because they considered themselves ‘anti-fascistic’,” he explained. “But in the late 80s they suddenly came up with an idea to let Soviet Jews into the country and give them permanent residency, as an alternative to the lack of reparations payments.

“Then the two Germanys reunited and it was something they couldn’t undo, the law was already there. They had to give it a name, so they called us ‘Kontingentflüchtlinge’ which doesn’t make sense because there was no quota. It was just a political term.

“They allowed every Jew who had this fifth category in their passport to come to live in Germany.”

My eyelids draw back sharply.

“So you’re saying that the Germans used the Russian classification to determine whether people were Jewish?” I asked.

Robert nodded.

“And did the Russians care if it was your mother or your father who was Jewish?”

“Actually they cared only if it was your father,” Robert replied with a smile. “They didn’t care if it was your mother. So it was the Halacha turned upside down.”

I was still assimilating his words. “I had thought it was the Germans who preferred not to make the distinction between matrilineal and patrilineal Jews,” I remarked.

“Yeah, of course, because of the history the Germans were really open,” Robert replied. “If there were some doubts, they would still say okay because they didn’t want to get into trouble again. They didn’t want to make the selection again.”

Selection. Neither of us said anything for a moment. Robert picked up some crumbs of sugar off the coffee table with his forefinger and rubbed them against his thumb.

“Did your parents identify themselves as Jews,” I asked him, “never mind the official versions?”

“Yes, they did. And they do. But in a very Soviet kind of way. It depends which part of the Soviet Union your family are from, but usually you’re more or less very secular. We don’t celebrate any Jewish holidays but my parents are very tensely connected to other Soviet Jews. So there is something of a Jewish culture which is not connected to religion.”

So it’s the stories, the sense of humour, the food?

“Food, yes of course. My grandmother used to make *gefilte* fish and a lot of Ashkenazi Jewish dishes. But they’re also weirdly combined with Russian food. So then you have pork sausage on the other side.”

Our laughter dissolved into the next question.

“People from other countries ask me how it is to live in Germany as a Jew. I’m like, actually not a big thing. I think there are other countries in the world that are dealing a lot worse with this issue.”

He took a sip of coffee that by now had turned lukewarm.

“But there’s still something underneath, which to me is not openly anti-Semitic, at least not in my surroundings or my generation. But there is something, yeah.

"If you give the regular educated German a ‘truth drug’ I think they would say ‘the Jews are good with money’ and all these conspiracy theories. I think that’s what’s underneath the German politeness. It’s like with the circumcision debate a few years ago.

“There’s this saying, ‘*Was der Bauer nicht kennt, frisst er nicht’* – ‘the farmer doesn’t eat what the farmer doesn’t know’. It’s a very German thing. If we don’t understand it, we’d better make a ban on it. I think it’s a lack of open-mindedness. In Germany people always decide about other people without asking them.

“I’ve met a lot of people here who are very extreme against Israeli politics, but who I don’t think are anti-Semitic, but then there are some people who use the anti-Israel movement to say something bad about Jews in general.”

The sun had disappeared behind the clouds. On Robert’s feet were grey felt slippers, the same colour and texture as the sky.

“Anti-Semitism also depends if you’re in a city or in a small town. We ended up moving to Hannover. My parents built a house there when I was 15 years old, 40 minutes out of the city. It was something between a suburb and a village.

“When everybody was divided into religion classes, my brother said he was Jewish and offered to show them a recording of our cousin’s Bar Mitzvah. He was about 13 at the time. He brought it to school and after that they started bullying him, saying, ‘Look at this Jew’.

“It’s an accusation, it’s used to insult somebody.”

His features fell flat.

“In Germany we have a lot of education about the Holocaust. They make a big effort to talk about the history. I remember we had the Third Reich for three years in a row in history class.

“But it remains something special, something that doesn’t really fit in to German society, even though we were part of the society. That’s the difference between living here and Jews in the States, where it’s a living culture that you can see every day.”

I watched his eyes slide back to the window.

“Now I’m thinking about it, even in history class, they teach you that there were the Germans and the Jews. There was this separation.”

He returned to face me. “It’s problematic to make this difference. It’s the same as if somebody would make a difference between me and my German friends now, because I consider myself German. They never really identified to the students that these Jews were Germans.”

I asked him about the film he was working on. His hands lay still on his lap. It was easy to imagine them holding a camera steady while his slight frame moved nimbly beneath it.

“It’s called Jewish Russian German. I call it ‘the identity triangle’,” he explained.

“It’s something that goes from one angle to another during different situations in my life. So there was a time when I was in Israel a lot and I felt more Jewish. In my childhood I always tried to be as German as possible, to assimilate. Now I’m very proud of being Russian origin.

His pale moustache stretched over his lips as he smiled. “I see it as something helpful because I can be a translator between those cultures, and I can choose between them.

“My first question in all the interviews was, ‘What are you? Are you Jewish? Are you Russian? Are you German? They all said, ‘I am me, I am myself’. I only got it then, a couple of months ago. It’s very simple: it’s easier for people around you to get an idea of you, when they label you.

“My outside world, my way of life is a German one. But I still believe there is something like a Russian soul. The Jewish part of me is something like a connection, like strings. I am an atheist but I am still connected, let’s say, to this ‘nation of Jews’. I’ve felt it a lot of times, this feeling of being at home everywhere.”

Chapter Twenty
2017, Munich

We’d been living in Munich for nine months, as long as it takes for an embryo to gestate into a baby, I couldn’t help thinking. I received an invitation to a charity evening. I followed neat footpaths past villas of various shapes arranged in consecutive rows. The summer light bounced off their facades, making their windows twinkle. Glossy cars shivered into double garages. I’d left my bicycle at the underground station near home, squeezed against the rusted pole I’d used to secure my lock. I checked the legs of my jumpsuit for grease. I swivelled my torso and swiped at my bottom as my heels tapped along, hoping I hadn’t sat on anything.

A waiter stood at the end of Lauren’s driveway with a tray of champagne glasses. I took one on my way to the garden where a chef was cooking sides of salmon on an open grill and ladies in cocktail dresses were arranged in bouquets. On the lawn were tables, each set for 10, brightly decorated.

I had met Lauren through a mutual friend who’d invited us to dinner. She happened to be sitting next to me. She was from New York, where she had met her German husband at university. She had grown up in a household whose liberal version of Judaism sounded very much like mine. Our heads, hers with its thick ebony tresses, mine with fair curls, moved closer together as we chuckled over familiar stories and she fleshed out the

intricacies of the community here. She was very much involved in *Beth Shalom;* she had been its president, sat on the board, and she sang in the choir.

More guests were arriving at her party. I didn't recognise anyone. Lauren introduced me to one of her three sons. Between his studies, he played soccer for the German Maccabi team. I asked him if he had competed in the Maccabi Games in Berlin in 2015. I had read a few articles about it. All had the same focus: the location. Teams of Jewish athletes from all over the world including Germany had competed at the Olympic Park right beside the Olympic Stadium. The same stadium where in 1936 German Jews had been forbidden to participate in the Summer Olympic Games. He replied easily that he had been there. He was about to go to Israel to play some more matches.

In January 2016, Benyamin had taken me to the *Werkstatt Galerie* in west Berlin to show me his photograph in a group exhibition curated to coincide with the Maccabi Games the previous year. His image was the centrepiece. Shot against a mural of semi-naked Roman swordsmen, it showed a quintet of Jewish athletes in formation on the rungs of a triangular ladder set up on the tiles of a swimming hall.

"The curator wanted to show the Germans that she could live here as a Jew and be fine," Benyamin leant in to my ear as we looked at his artwork. "For me it was not about this.

"It's a deliberate play on the Nazistic imagery." The arch of his right brow lifted high above his eyes. "My intention was to provoke the history."

I began to mingle and found myself next to Adriana, who'd just arrived at Lauren's party. Like most of the others, she was a decade older than me. I found something soft and at the same time serious in her face. It beckoned me as though we were already friends. She told me she was born in Brazil to German parents who had also lived in Colombia. As well as Portuguese and German, she spoke Spanish, French and English. Her husband was an American Jew. Their son was a few years older than Samuel, who was now half-way through his first year of uni. I told her how nine months ago Simon and I had moved here with the twins, who were six, and Lucia, who was 16. Her face fell.

"Sixteen?" she confirmed. "Yes," I smiled. Adriana looked aghast.

When she was the same age, her parents had decided to move back to Munich from São Paulo. Her older sister was studying at university elsewhere. Adriana was sent to boarding school. She hated it. Hated Germany. After a year it started to feel more familiar, but still she couldn't shake the sense that her parents had uprooted her at a perilous age to a place as different as any she could imagine from the one where she'd grown up. Her parents didn't like it either.

"After three years they couldn't stand it any longer," she exclaimed, her aqueous eyes jumping out over the delicate stream of black eyeliner that matched the hair framed around her pale face.

"And they moved to Spain!" She laughed bitterly. "So there I was, stuck in Germany, more or less alone, as a young woman. Terrible!"

"How is your daughter coping?" she wanted to know. I told her that it hadn't been easy for her, but I was convinced she would thank me in the end.

"Don't be so sure!" Adriana replied.

"I'm a psychotherapist." She looked at me carefully. "Do you want to know who my clients are?"

I nodded.

"I help Spanish and Portuguese speakers with their adjustment issues. It's hard for them, living in Germany." I nodded again. She looked at me meaningfully. "Very hard."

"I can imagine it would be much the same coming from Australia," she added. "And your daughter is Jewish."

Her words floated between us in a way that reminded me of Amir's warning at the flea market, when he'd quietly told me what two of my other children might need, or what I might need to give them. I had the fleeting sensation I was a character in a fable being visited by messengers sent to deliver me warnings or advice. If that were true, I reflected, there would have to be a third envoy, still to come.

We chose some food from the buffet and Adriana invited me to sit with her. We discovered we lived a few streets away from each other. How are you getting home? she wanted to know. The train I guess, I replied.

“I’ll drive you,” she said.

We heard the tines of a fork tapping a glass. A hush fell over the garden as Lauren faced us on the terrace. She described the Israeli art project in aid of peace between Jews, Arabs and Christians that we were all here to support. Although they were spoken in German, her words came out in a steady drawl, pulling America to us. She paused meaningfully at the end of each sentence. I watched her mouth stretching into what I recognised as its default position, a wide smile. She’d be wonderful in a crisis, I mused. The project sounded impressive, well-meaning, sensitively executed. My eyes traced the outline of her house down to the buffet where waiters were laying out miniature dishes of tiramisù. Below them the multicoloured petals looked so pretty together in their beds. Lauren’s face glowed in the remains of the evening. In those moments I was happy to be persuaded that, with an advocate like her, Middle East peace might be achieved.

“Would it suit you to leave a bit early?” I whispered to Adriana. “There’s a documentary that I really want to watch tonight.”

“Don’t worry,” her eyes flashed. “I’m sure everybody here will be leaving early to watch it.”

It had been all over the news. Its subject was the headline-grabbing triumvirate of Jews, Europe and anti-Semitism but it might have floated by, had two things not happened. The first was that *Arte*, the broadcasting network who had commissioned it, decided after it was delivered to bin it, apparently without telling the filmmakers. The second was that a tabloid newspaper had got hold of a copy and decided, guerilla-style, to show it themselves.

A week before Lauren’s garden party, *Bild*, the closest thing Germany has to one of London’s “red tops”, illegally streamed the film “*Chosen and Excluded – the Hate for Jews in Europe”* for 24 hours.

Its headline read,

“Jew-Hatred: *Bild* Shows The Documentary That *Arte* Does Not Want to Show”.

It wasn’t a huge risk: *Arte* is a small, artsy French-German broadcaster. The chances of them suing was agreed to be slim. But the implications were massive. Two hundred thousand people clicked on the link.

A week later, by coincidence on the night of Lauren’s cocktail evening in aid of Middle East peace, *Bild*’s provocation yielded results. Not one, but two television networks screened the film, both on the same evening. First at 10.15 on *ARD,* the state broadcaster and, 45 minutes later, while the first screening was still running, on *Arte*.

Details leaked out in a gush. The filmmakers had submitted the film at the end of 2016. The brief had been “anti-Semitism in Europe”. The film’s focus was on how the IsraeliPalestinian conflict was being imported into Europe, where it fused with extant forms of anti-Semitism from the Right, elements of the Left, and among some Muslims. At times the three found common ground in one or more of the three “D”s proposed by the Israeli politician Natan Sharansky to define the contentious border between “legitimate criticism of Israel” and “anti-Semitism: delegitimisation, demonisation and double standards.

I returned home to find Simon at his computer watching the doco. It had started seconds before with a disclaimer from the broadcaster typed onto the screen. The producer had edited the original version of the film in eight places.

“These changes, however, were not enough, from our point of view … We now publish the documentation with legally necessary additional comments. In doing so, we protect the rights of third parties that are attacked in the film but are not listened to as well as [the rights] of journalism.”

The film opened with footage of the Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas addressing the European Parliament with the slander that an Israeli rabbi wanted to poison the Palestinian water supply (a claim that exploits the “blood libels” that have been around

since the Middle Ages, and that, two days after his address, Abbas admitted was made-up). He continued with the assertion that, if only the Israelis could make peace with the Palestinians, all the problems of the Middle East would immediately dissolve. The subtext was reasonably simple to decipher. The entire house of the European parliament, headed by its president Martin Schulz – who as the SPD (Social Democrat) candidate, was now widely considered the strongest contender running against Angela Merkel in the upcoming German elections – gave Abbas a standing ovation.

By another coincidence whose timing seemed scarcely credible, the *Bundestag* had spent that same Wednesday in June debating whether as a consequence of growing unease that had precipitated the report of a so-called "expert commission on anti-Semitism", to institute special anti-Semitism commissioners at state and federal levels. The opposition supported the immediate creation of these posts, it was only Angela Merkel's CDU that wanted to wait until after the election three months away.

After a few minutes, something curious began to happen. Moving along the bottom of the screen like a news ticker were a series of corrections. Viewers were directed to a specially conceived – and by the looks of it – hastily constructed website where viewers could find the "real" facts, namely those contradicting information presented by the filmmakers. A few minutes later, we watched a pair of young German anti-Israel protestors quoting from "the Protocols of the Elders of Zion", a fabricated anti-Semitic diatribe that claims to detail a Jewish plan for global domination.

"Even if it was a fake, somebody was pretty cool," one of them commented. No correction or contextualisation appeared at the base of the screen.

Directly after the film a live discussion panel was aired, hosted by the journalist Sandra Maischberger on her eponymous program and framed around the question: "Is there growing anti-Semitism in Europe?" There were six invited participants, including a German journalist and a member of Angela's Merkel's CDU, both of whom were hostile to the documentary and, to comparable degrees, to Israel. Michael Wolffsohn, the GermanJewish historian whose column I'd read questioning the incontestability of circumcision for Jews, now found himself faced off with the broadcaster's program director. He pointed out factual inaccuracies from the program's research team and cited

other documentaries that had been aired by *Arte* without qualm or correction. Like the recent one about Goldman Sachs implying that Jews control the world's money.

The only other Jewish panellist was Rolf Verleger, who invoked his Holocaust survivor parents to justify his stance.

"My mother was in Auschwitz; my father had the KZ tattoo on his forearm," he said, pointing to his sleeve while launching into a tirade claiming that the film was "propaganda".

He turned to another panellist, Ahmad Mansour, an Arab-Israeli psychologist and author whose advocacy against anti-Semitism, especially among Muslim youth in Germany, I had watched and read with interest.

"Ahmad Mansour returns as a Muslim to his own door and criticises anti-Semitism. This is what we Jews must do and criticise Israel's policy," Verleger insisted.

"Why?" countered Mansour. "Why do German Jews feel responsible for Israel?"

"The Central Council of Jews [in Germany] never criticises Israel," said Verleger as though he hadn't heard the question.

"Why should they do that?" replied Mansour.

Chapter Twenty One
Late summer, 2017, Munich

In August, my mum and stepdad came to stay. The twins were on school holidays, but we walked to the *Grundschule* they had attended for the last year. Its heavy doors were locked. We peered through last year's fingerprints to the foyer and the playground beyond, where sunlight caressed a lone tree.

"Isn't it great how we can walk here in 10 minutes?" I suggested. Everybody agreed it was.

We carried on for another half kilometre to the *Hort*, a by-product of the Bavarian primary school day, which ends by lunchtime. In times gone by the mother collected the children, brought them home for a warm lunch and homework then sent them out with the neighbourhood kids till dinnertime. Now there were *Horts*. Ours was cosy, with rooms for homework, free play, art and woodwork, a hall stocked with well-worn books, games, sofas and a small stage. In the centre a *Mensa* served cooked lunch and afternoon tea to kids aged six to 10 from three local schools.

Each weekday lunchtime they made the 15-minute walk there in small groups. On one of the early days I tried to shadow Lotte and Milo, who I found trailing at the rear. They spotted me within seconds and ran over. The other kids were already practising the street-crossing choreography that the *Hort* staff had drilled into them during a six-week training period. When the road was clear, two children blocked the way for cars with their bodies astride and arms outstretched like the figures in signs that hang over zebra crossings. Facing each other, they made a human tunnel for the others.

The *Hort* director explained that they'd managed this process without incident for 25 years. She suggested I trust the system. I had heard the same logic from Simon. If things go right almost all of the time, why would you behave in a way that anticipated the unlikelihood of things going wrong? Every Jew knows the answer to that question. Still, I tried my best to act like a German. I appreciated the idea that kids here were encouraged to be independent. My heart pounded in the middle of each weekday, waiting for the call I knew would materialise if they didn't appear on time. If I squeezed

the kids a bit too hard when I collected them, they didn't complain. Lotte had made a firm friend there.
Whenever I arrived early she pleaded to stay. Milo was friends with everybody. He wanted to know when I'd let him walk home alone just as lots of the others did. He could bring Lotte too, he assured me. *Hort* was so awesome, he reckoned, he wished he could live there.

At school it was different. If Lotte's *Brotzeit* box came home empty it meant she had sat alone during the break. Sometimes Milo steamed like a pressure cooker. It could take days for the details to leak out, of the playground or corridor scuffle that he'd tried to bury inside him. One morning the class bully, having exhausted his usual options, had a crack at Milo. His defender appeared in the form of a slight, teal-eyed girl who tended to observe rather than intervene.

"You leave my brother alone," she declared.

Even with an audience, the bully had been stunned enough to retreat.

The door to the *Hort* was unexpectedly open that afternoon, so we ventured inside. They were renovating. The director, a dark-haired woman in her mid-thirties whose hornrimmed glasses underscored her pale eyes, greeted us effusively. Within minutes my mum, typically convivial, had gleaned that she had a six-year-old daughter and lived nearby.

"Which of the local schools will she go to?" my mum enquired. I turned with interest.

The director blushed. "Actually, we've decided to send her to the international school," she replied, making hasty excuses about the benefits of English tuition, smaller class sizes and her husband's work as a lawyer.

"Why don't you do that too?" my mum nudged me gently as we left.

I rubbed my fingers together. "Anyway, we think it's great for the kids to go to the local school. They can already speak English."

Her eyebrows articulated the full force of the Jewish mother's rhetorical.

"And would it hurt you to have a look at the alternatives?"

The idea had occurred to me, more often than I wished to admit. State primary schools here are strictly governed by geographical boundaries. Everything else is private. I had a fistful of rationales I could use to knock out virtually any of them: We weren't expats. We were here independently. Simon was German. The twins were bilingual. We supported egalitarianism and local community. Nearly all of our friends here were German. If they had young kids, they sent them to local state schools. Most people did. Private schools were thought of here as places you sent your kids if they had "problems" or needed "spoon-feeding" or if you wanted to one-up your neighbours. Simon had always chafed at the Australian way of sending your kids to the best school you could afford, making them journey on buses and trains or – heaven forbid – driving them there. True, the Jewish school – there was only one – was something else. I had seen it in the middle of the city where it stood, guarded by security, and pushed it out of my mind.

My parents had left behind their families in Melbourne when they moved to Sydney just before I was born. From the age of three until 10 my brother and I went to a Jewish preschool and primary school before we were offered places at two non-denominational private schools. At different junctures and for diverse reasons, each of us absconded in favour of the public system. It better suited our anti-authoritarian tendencies. Our parents, perhaps unconsciously, had encouraged us in this by virtue of what I thought was the single best bit of being Jewish: Everything was up for being questioned. Even the questions.

Our primary school was our incubator, small and lined with cotton wool. The friends we made there and their parents became our surrogate extended family. We took slapstick summer adventures together in leaky houseboats and damp cabins. We celebrated the festivals of *Pesach* and *Rosh Hashanah*, and the "Breaking of the Fast" after *Yom Kippur* around their dinner tables and ours.

Most of our schoolteachers were friendly Wasps, except for the ones who taught Hebrew and Jewish Studies. Their eyes seemed to have been plucked from river beds, black and apple green against caramel skin. Their voices were broken by flecks of gravel, thick and

strange. Their tales of Moses and his Red Sea, David and his slingshot tickled my ears like sand from a faraway planet. I grasped that I needed their language to read the prayer books and sing the songs. I can still make my way through that beautiful calligraphy. When I go to *Shul* the words and melodies return to me. Apart from those teachers, almost nobody we knew came from Israel. My friends' grandparents carried variations of unspoken histories very much like those of my own. Their voices breathed like accordions, their lilting and sighing transporting me to earlier times in the continental places that were my other, imaginary home.

Like everything else at home, being Jewish was like the *Challah* we ate on Friday nights, warm and sweet and sprinkled with generous pinches of salt. In Germany I had plenty of practice attempting to convey what that meant to faces formed into shapes of curiosity and confusion. Their insistent questions, whether asked or implied, compelled me to answer to what I'd never needed to give all that much thought. What kind of Jew was I, who ate everything, who'd go out on Friday nights, whose views on God and Israel couldn't be reliably deduced?

It was a question, I volunteered, of something more and less than what they might think. Not so much "Judaism" as "Jewishness". It took something from the religion and the traditions, but it was much more idiosyncratic than that. It was a mish-mash of things that lived deep inside me that I could taste and feel more than anything I could have been taught, and that I could shape to fit my broader beliefs. These contradictions, I tried to explain, weren't discrepant with it. They were "it".

At the end of my entreaties, more often than not I faced heads rotated sideways on their axes, mouths that formed questions, now uttered aloud. The same questions with which they'd begun: "But you don't really eat pork?" "Don't you go to the synagogue?" "Do you support Israel?"

"Yes and no," I would protest. "It depends." I could have answered all of their questions that way. Even among the ultra religious, I insisted, things could depend. I might as well have been throwing feathers at lampposts. Sometimes, in desperation, I told them about the ketchup.

A few months after Simon and I got together, my cousin's son celebrated his *Bar Mitzvah* in an orthodox synagogue in Melbourne. My cousin was as liberal as I was. So was her husband. But in previous generations his family had been more religious, so they still belonged to a *frum Shul.* That was nothing extraordinary. I sat with my mum and Lucia upstairs with the women, most of whom talked through the service. Downstairs, led by rabbis with curly *payot* at their ears, beards falling to their chests, the men swayed and intoned. Whenever we rose, I peered over the balcony to check on Simon. My stepfather was standing next to him, pointing things out. I could see Samuel trying to keep his eyes open. Afterwards, on the way to the lunch at a restaurant by the river, Simon looked pale. He didn't say much. His eyes darted around tables set up like at a wedding, musicians warming up the crowd, the dance floor awaiting us. The rabbis, seated together at a table close to the kitchen, were still praying. Samuel and Lucia were at a table next to us with some other kids. The main course arrived: fish and chips arranged like Jenga blocks. I looked at Samuel. I knew he'd want ketchup. I called over a waiter. He returned emptyhanded.

"I'm really sorry. We do have ketchup, but this is a kosher function."

Isn't ketchup kosher? He didn't know. He returned to the kitchen. I watched the chef come out and approach one of the rabbis. Leaning over him at a reasonable angle, he looked like a white bishop considering whether to take out the black castle. The rabbi consulted with the other rabbis. I watched their beards move up and down. The first rabbi said something to the chef, who retreated. The waiter returned with a small dish on a saucer. The rabbi accepted it, stood up and, stopping to greet a dozen guests on the way, walked to the kids' table. He held in his palm the dish, although he didn't mention or even look at it.

"What do you think, *Kinderle?*" he began. "In life, should we should be like cedar trees or reeds?"

The kids looked anxious. A cedar tree was strong and sturdy, a reed was flimsy. But they knew that the answers to questions such as these weren't usually what they seemed. One tried being clever.

"Neither?" The rabbi raised an eyebrow. "Both?" the kid made a second attempt.

“In the *Talmud,”* intoned the rabbi like he was still asking a question, *“*it says we should never be as inflexible as a cedar tree.” He paused while this sunk in. “We should be flexible like reeds.”

The kids, as far as I could tell, were holding their breath. The rabbi’s eyes moved to the plate in his left hand, and he began to recite a prayer, waving his right hand over it as he did so. He smiled at the kids and handed over their treasure.

“Look at that, now the ketchup’s kosher,” I quipped to Simon.

His mouth was agape. I grinned. He smiled back and the colour returned to his cheeks.

“That’s your first lesson about Judaism,” I said. “Doesn’t matter which kind of Jew you are. Where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

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Despite my cherished primary years, I tended to agree with Simon that religion and schools were preferably kept separate. It was a principle I tried to self-affirm in Munich even when our local school didn’t present much of a case for it. All those Jesuses dying on their crosses on the walls were just Bavarian furniture, weren’t they? The kids crafting the baby Jesus in his manger in Ethics class, being taken on an excursion to the local Catholic church where the priest entreated them to urge their parents to attend Sunday mass, that was just the start of something more comparative, wasn’t it? There’d be synagogues and mosques later, wouldn’t there? In the third class they would learn about Judaism, I’d been told. That was another year away.

I thought of Amir from the flea market, how with no effort at all he had taken me to a place that had felt like home, how he’d suggested we consider the Jewish school. I remembered the parting words he had whispered to me. I allowed myself to hear them again.

“You might find it helps.”

Simon's aunt Uschi was a primary school teacher in Regensburg, a medieval Bavarian town. She and his uncle, an economics professor at the university, also had a pair of girlboy twins, 15 years older than Lotte and Milo, who would be home from their studies for a long weekend. My mum and stepdad had flown home. Would we come and stay?

After breakfast, while Lotte and Milo ran around their backyard, I asked Uschi about the school where she taught. I was curious about the primary school ethics curriculum. Could she shed any light? She returned from her study with a tome that pounded her dining table like an old phone book. The pages were bound with metal rings. She began to read, flicking through thick sheets one after the other, reading out excerpts until she raised her eyes and concluded,

"There's a huge amount of material here. Some of it is mandatory. But in the end it's up to the individual teacher what they choose to emphasise."

"And what they don't?" I replied rhetorically, turning to Simon.

He began asking her questions, the answers to which I took in with my closest ear. The other one was tuned to the sounds in my head. I kept my focus on both tracks by keeping my eyes on the kids, who were still playing outside. I pictured the schoolteacher who took their ethics class, her hair tied in a knot at her neck, a ring-bound manual under her forefinger, and strained to hear the words coming out of her mouth: *Shema*, *Shabbat*, *Shiva.* Maybe there were too many other voices in the room, because I found I couldn't hear her at all.

Chapter Twenty Two

At Café Zelig the following week, I asked Fabiana. Wasn't her daughter at the Jewish preschool? She was. Was she happy? Yes, very. Even though neither of you is Jewish? She shrugged.

"In Brazil I've always had Jewish friends. Having my kid at the Jewish school, being around Jews, even the crazy ones, it's normal for me. It makes me feel more at home. They might be nuts, but they've got heart, you know?" I grinned and nodded.

What did she know about the primary school?

She had heard it was very good.

Wasn't it conservative?

"In theory, yeah, but what can they really do? It's got everyone thrown in together there like a soup." Her eyes flashed.

"Orthodox, conservative, progressive, nothing. They're all there. Russians, Israelis, Jews married to Germans, German Jews." She winked so I could see the peacock blue eyeliner on her lids.

"There's plenty of Germans there too."

"You mean Germans who aren't Jewish?"

"Yep."

"How many?"

"They say it's 30 per cent. But really it's more."

"Really?" I quite liked the sound of that, actually. "Why are they there?"

"Why do you think they're there?"

I widened my eyes. She nodded back at me. I swallowed.

"If I was choosing between the Jewish school and the local school?

"Are you kidding me? If you can afford it – and you can even get a big discount because you're Jewish – you shouldn't even hesitate."

"Really?" I said again.

She rolled her eyes and put her hands on my shoulders.

“Listen, you’re gonna trust those Germans to teach your kids about Judaism?”

I laughed so hard I had to wipe away tears with a cake napkin.

“Look,” she suggested. “Don’t take it from me. You should talk to my friend Limor. She’s our age. Two kids. Pretty secular. Married to a German. No bullshit. You’ll like her. She’s like you, but Israeli,” she chuckled.

“Her eldest son is going into the fourth class. She’ll tell you everything you want to know.”

I called Limor. She invited me over with the twins. While the four kids played, she and I drank coffee on her balcony facing a central courtyard in an old brewery conversion on the other side of the city. Three hours later, I’d have sworn we’d known each other for years. I had to bite my lip to stop myself from finishing her sentences. Even then I chewed off her ear as much as I listened. The kids, the parents, the teachers. I knew it by heart, the prizes and the pitfalls.

As I stood at her front door to take the kids home, I remembered the question that had been hanging on my tongue.

“Oh, one more thing, how did you convince your husband?”

“I didn’t have to,” she laughed. “He’s thrilled to have our kids there.”

My eyes fell to my feet. “Oh,” I replied.

“I’m happy to talk to your husband if you like,” she offered, hugging me. “Or he can chat to mine.”

I thanked her. I knew I wouldn’t take her up on it. While he might find other people’s experiences interesting, Simon could brush them off as easily as a light dusting of rain. If he was to be persuaded, it would be on the basis of his forming an independent judgement with the power to override conclusions he had already drawn. I considered

my usual tactic of throwing everything at him, hoping something might stick. I wasn't sure it would work this time.

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"Let's meet for lunch," suggested Nina. "I can take an hour out from work."

The first time we'd met, at an evening arranged for the parents at *Hort*, I knew immediately she wasn't from Munich. It wasn't only that she was dressed in black with chunky silver rings on her fingers and ears, a rare sight in this town.

The weather had turned cooler now. The sky's curtains drew shut over each evening with a solemnity that matched my contemplations. On menus appeared dishes familiar to me from the mountain huts we stopped at in wintertime. Over-seasoned broths with floating chopped pancakes or balls of liver, pasta tossed with mixed leftovers and spiked with last night's pork sausage.

I had been drawn to Nina from the moment I heard her voice ringing out on the stairs to the *Hort*, like bells being struck at intervals by someone with years of practice. My instinct that she had grown up in the former east Germany was borne out in those first few minutes. Her parents had been *Gastarbeiter* from eastern Europe. She was a person who said what she thought, and she thought a great deal. Evenings with her, I had learned, crawled into the early hours of the morning. Now, between mouthfuls from steaming bowls of indeterminate pasta, I explained our conundrum.

She believed strongly in the separation of church and state, she told me, pushing stray blonde strands away from her fleshy cheekbones and attaching them with a clip to the back of her head. It didn't matter which kind of church or state. Religion didn't belong in schools. And schools should be public, equal to all. The rings on her fingers struck the bench. It occurred to me that she'd make an excellent politician. The federal election was being held in a couple of weeks. *Die Linke* was expected to haemorrhage votes to the AfD (*Alterntativ für Deutschland*), a party that was attempting to sanitise its anti-Europe, anti-Islam, Imperialist views with a familiar style of populism. Everyone I knew was terrified it might bear out the predictions and snatch up to a fifth of the vote, in the eastern states especially. The Left or the Greens could do with someone like her.

What about the compulsory religion classes at the local school? I interjected. Her child took Ethics class, not *Reli*, she replied. Sure, so did ours, I insisted. But she must have got the gist of what they were learning in that class?

She sighed. “Yes, I’m not happy about it either. I’ve already made a complaint.” She snickered. “Welcome to Bavaria.”

But, she went on, her forearms mounting the bench between us, had I thought of what Lotte and Milo would learn in religion class at the Jewish school? How convinced was I that they wouldn’t be indoctrinated? She shook her head. She wouldn’t expose her daughter to that kind of risk.

I told her about my primary school, how we’d recognised even as kids what we thought was worth holding onto and what we could flick away. Surely Lotte and Milo would do the same.

“Why don't you just give them the Jewish stuff yourself? It can’t be that hard, can it?” she proposed.

It was the same argument I’d heard from the mother of Lotte’s *Hort* friend. A mist had fallen over her brown eyes when I told her we were considering changing schools. Lea would be heartbroken if Lotte left. Surely there was another solution. She unwrapped the patterned scarf she had tied around her neck that contrasted appealingly with her fingernails, which were painted tomato red. There was a *Gymnasium* not far from where we lived, she suggested. Her younger brother had gone there. They had a Jewish religion class in that high school. It was one of the only ones, maybe even the only one in Munich. *Gymnasium* was another three years away, I demurred. Still, I jotted down the name and later looked it up. Albert Einstein had been educated there for a while. That didn’t surprise me. You could hardly walk around our neighbourhood without spotting a plaque to commemorate a famous artist or writer, poet or philosopher who had lived there. Rainer Maria Rilke, Thomas Mann, Gabriele Münter and Wassily Kandinsky, Lion Feuchtwanger.

Sure, I could teach our kids some things, I tried to explain to Nina, I had made *Shabbat* at home a few times. That was part of it, but there was much more. Out of 400 kids at our local school, 398 of them weren't Jewish, I reminded her.

"I just want it to feel normal for them," I winked. "As normal as being Jewish here can feel."

Nina smiled and leaned back in her chair. She could understand, but had I thought about what I was willing to give up for that? She counted the trade-offs on one hand, starting, as people in Germany do, with her thumb: It would be a real shame that Lotte and Milo couldn't walk to school. It was so beneficial for kids to do that.

She pushed down her left forefinger: They needed time off. They'd be there in lessons all day instead of at *Hort* by lunchtime. When would they play?

Her middle finger was next: Her daughter and the other kids would really miss them. We'd only been in Munich for a year. Those friendships were important for the kids.

Ring finger: Sure, they'd make new friends, but they'd live all over Munich. Is that what we wanted?

Pinky: And the building, it's a fortress. They'd be stuck in a bubble in there.

I had heard all these arguments before. At home, from Simon. From his parents, secondhand. From Friederike. From Nicole and Florian. I imagined them all with their arms linked, gaining momentum as they marched towards me. I thought of Milo wanting to live at *Hort*, dreaming of when I'd let him walk home alone. Of Lotte and her friend there, lost in their imaginary worlds. I thought of the security guards at the entrance to the Jewish school. The tram or underground train or bicycle or car journey there. The Rabbis with their beards. And the kids, dressed up for *Purim*.

"What's more important, identity or freedom?" I asked Nina, trying to move my thoughts from the pragmatics that were making my heart hurt to something more philosophical.

We spent the next hour turning over the strands. I looked down at the remains of my pasta. It had gone cold. How much was of it was leftovers, what was fresh? I pushed the bowl away. I wasn't sure I could recognise any more what the real ingredients were.

Chapter Twenty Three

A few days before the school year was due to start, I marched into the bedroom before I could chicken out and stabbed some numbers into my phone. I had grown to resent them, even though it was me who'd written them down on the notepad I'd left open next to my side of the bed. The dial tone rang in my ear, once, twice, again. I willed myself not to hang up.

A clipped voice greeted me before I could renege. "*Sinaischule*, Frank."

"Hallo?"

Yes, I was there, trying to form the words. What was it I wanted to say? It all fell out at once: Twins, six years old, about to start the second class, Australian, Jewish, German, I was wondering, could we perhaps come by at a convenient time, to have a look?

"A girl and a boy, is that right? Twins? Second class? Wait a moment, please."

The line went silent. She must have been checking the calendar for the open day, I surmised. It was taking rather a while.

She came back on. "We've got two spots, would you like them?"

"I … uhh … I. Two spots?"

"Yes, this is very unusual. We only have three classes per grade. A maximum of 15 kids in each. We've had two kids leave in this level. A girl and a boy. Would you like them or not?"

I held the phone away from my head and looked at it, as though it might intervene on my behalf.

“Uhh … I need to think … I wasn’t expecting … I need to discuss this with my husband.”

“Yes of course. Let me know as soon as possible.”

Simon was in the bathroom. One of his wrists was twisting so he could see the face of his watch, the other held his toothbrush, working on his molars.

“The Jewish school has spots for Lotte and Milo.”

“What?”

“The Jewish school has spots for Lotte and Milo,” I repeated.

“What? Now?” he spluttered. He spat toothpaste into the sink. There was still foam in his mouth.

“I’m as surprised as you are,” I declared. “I just called and she offered them to me on the spot.”

“You realise school goes back next week? I thought we’d said we’d just have a look, maybe for next year? Maybe. And even then, do we really want another change for the kids? Religious instruction? Security guards? I-so…” He spat out the rest of the toothpaste.

“Isolation? Is that what you wanted to say?”

“Well, yes … they would be isolated.”

“I …” I replied again. “Wouldn’t you say they’re a bit isolated where they are now?”

“What do you mean?” He wiped his mouth with a hand towel. “Look, I’ve gotta go to work. Let’s talk about this later, OK?”

I nodded. Kissed him goodbye. Closed the front door behind him and leant my back against it.

I could hear the kids down the hall giving voice to their Lego figurines. I stepped into their room and shrieked, fell onto my bottom and lifted my foot. A plastic policeman the size of a cornflake was stuck under my toes. The kids laughed like a pair of seals, clambered onto me, knocking me over with their hugs, wiping my tears with hands still sticky from breakfast. What do you think about checking out a new school? I asked them. Their eyes opened wide, the colours of the ocean I missed so much shining down at me.

Two days later we caught the tram into town. The kids counted seven stops till Sendlinger Tor. Milo wondered loudly to Lotte what she thought it might be like “at the Jewish school”. What kind of stuff did she reckon they’d do there? Did she think it would all be Jewish? I flicked my eyes around the carriage, wishing he would stop saying “Jewish”, not wanting to say so. I looked out the window. Wasn’t that why we were making this journey? I asked myself. Milo was still speculating. A couple of heads had turned in our direction. Simon wasn’t saying much.

“Cool, it’s like at the airport!” the kids enthused as we went past the x-ray machine into a sparkling blonde foyer.

I was reminded of an evening a few weeks earlier when I’d taken Simon to hear Khatia Buniatishvili play Debussy on a glossy black Steinway. As the sunshine fell in through the windows into the school foyer, I thought of the pale polished wood of the *Philharmonie*, the light catching the sides of the instruments, the top of a polished shoe, the glitter of a hair barrette. She had begun the first piece on her own, her hands flying like sparrows over the keys. At a certain point the orchestra had joined in with her like a flock lifting her higher, holding her in their formation.

Upstairs, the Director of Studies tucked her short blonde hair behind her ears and greeted us with an infectious grin. She offered us water and invited us to meet the principal, who wouldn’t be long. We heard her chatting with the kids, explaining that she was going to ask them to do some things. They could feel completely relaxed, it wasn’t a test, she just wanted to get an idea about what they could so, and how they were feeling. She left the

door open. Afterwards, she showed them some things they could play with. A tub of playground games. Upturned buckets with ropes attached that they could stomp around on. Life-size puzzles.

She took us into an adjoining room, broke into another smile and began to answer our questions before we'd asked them. Like all the teachers except the ones who took Hebrew and Religion, she was not Jewish. The curriculum was the same as in any other German school, just that religion classes were always Jewish and the extra hours for Hebrew went on top, which meant full days of school except on Fridays. I could see Simon begin to relax. He looked down to the questions in his notebook, and, one at a time, began ticking them off.

That evening he phoned his parents. I paced the corridor, not really trying not to eavesdrop. After a while I heard him pressing some of my own arguments. The same ones he'd vigorously rebuffed from me. My face contorted. Then I let it unfold into a smile. In the privacy of my thoughts I had put some of his counter-arguments to myself too. The same ones I'd vigorously rebuffed from him. I ran through them in my head. Maybe it would be enough to take them to synagogue more often. Perhaps we could celebrate the festivals at home. But who would I invite?

I looked at myself in the hallway mirror. Who would hold it all together? One of our neighbours had told me in the stairwell this morning, when I had tried to flash her a bright smile, that I looked tired.

Each evening, hours after the kids had gone to bed, we sat spinning our rationales to each other across the kitchen table until our mouths turned dry. I heard my voice rising as I constructed my arguments into towers of vindication, twisting and turning the layers as though that might help my husband see them from another side. Simon repeated the same points he had held all along. Hardest was when he sat for minutes on end without saying anything at all.

How could I convey to him how much this meant to me? Until now I hadn't known how much it had. It was the process of arguing for what I believed in, I realised, that had taught me the depth of my belief in it. I tried to envisage staying put. If there were a few other Jewish kids at the local school, I might have relented. But how could our kids have

a clue what it might mean to be Jewish in the place where it was strangest of all? It wasn't about something specific I wanted them to learn, language or prayers or anything that could be taught. It had to do with the feeling of being with other Jewish people. The feeling that it was a kind of home. Especially here.

I called my mum. She and my stepdad were in the middle of a family *Rosh Hashanah* dinner. Down the phone line the heritage we'd all imbibed at *Gaga*'s table travelled to my world from hers, the one I longed to keep infusing into the children's spirits. She put me on speaker so I could hear my stepdad too. In their voices I could hear their efforts to contain their excitement. We should decide for ourselves, they insisted. They didn't want to interfere. It must be our decision. Both of ours. I knew that, whatever their preferences, they really meant it. Still, there was one thing they might suggest: if they had two spots, why not try it? The kids could always go back to the local school if they didn't like it. Nothing would be set in stone.

A few days later I went back in to the school to hand in some paperwork. The kids' school reports, health cards, the usual things. The way felt more familiar, but I couldn't stop my head from lurching around as I approached. As I reached the entrance, a couple emerged from Café Einstein and asked me the way to the "Marien Tower". I had to blink twice to make sure they weren't Valerie and Miracle Max from *The Princess Bride.* Delighted to have been taken for a local, I replied in detail.

"So we could go left or right, but you want we should go right?" demanded the old woman from under her newsboy's hat. She looked at her husband. He opened his mouth and closed it. Then she turned back to me. "Why do you want we should go right?"

I grinned at her *chutzpah*, asking for directions, then questioning them.

"Because it's more scenic," I offered, explaining how. She seemed satisfied now. She thanked me, took Miracle Max by the elbow and led him away, to the right. I stood watching them fondly. After a few steps, Valerie turned back.

"By the way," she crooned in her husky Brooklyn twang, dropping her husband's arm so she could wave both hands in encouragement. "Your English is really good!"

I burst into laughter and looked around for someone to share the moment with, but I was alone.

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Because I was Jewish, we were eligible for a 50 per cent discount on the school fees. To get it, I would need to join the *Gemeinde.* Until now I had hesitated about becoming a member of the official community, for two reasons. I walked back through the foyer and took a different lift upstairs to the official community offices, which were orthodox. That was one reason. The other wasn't so easy to articulate. It had something to do with being officially registered as Jewish in Germany. Still, I reasoned, I could go and talk to them.

Then I could see.

At the front desk of a vestibule that gave onto various offices, I explained my purpose. The receptionist, whose real hair was covered with a beige *Sheitel* that sat high on her forehead, buzzed somebody. An Israeli woman came to greet me in thickly accented, otherwise impeccable German. She led me to her office. She didn't suggest I sit down but stood facing me between a wall of bookshelves and her desk.

"You'd like to join the *Gemeinde*?"

I nodded awkwardly.

"Is your mother Jewish?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Was her mother Jewish?"

"Yes."

"Where was she from?"

"Russia … well, actually it was Ukraine at some stage, also Poland, I think. You know the history."

I smiled. She didn't.

"Were your parents married in an orthodox synagogue?"

My chest tightened. "No, a liberal synagogue."

She raised her eyebrows, exhaled. "You'll need to bring in some papers. The rabbi will want to talk to you."

Talk to me? Was he going to ask me to recite the *Shema* and quiz me on Jewish festivals?

"What kind of papers?" I asked, frowning.

"Whatever official documents you have, from your mother, your grandmother, to show that she was Jewish."

I clenched my jaw but my tears were already on their way.

"My grandmother?" I choked. "You're asking me for papers to prove that she was Jewish?"

Did we have papers? I pictured my parents' *Ketubah* with its curling script. I thought of Dusia, my beautiful *Buba*, and her sisters whom I'd never met. Clara, Sonia, Cilla and Lisa, my namesake. I heard the *Yiddish* melodies that coloured all the languages *Buba* had spoken. I thought of her mother looking out from a small monochrome square with *Buba*'s eyes and my own, the only photograph, the only evidence of her that we had.

"Do you realise what you're asking me?" I demanded. The tears had turned my voice husky.

"Do you think we have papers sitting in a drawer somewhere? You think my grandmother took papers with her to show she was Jewish when she was on the run from the Nazis?"

I inhaled and kept on.

“How you can ask me that? In an office, here in Germany…”

I couldn’t go on. The woman was dumbstruck. Maybe she had a point. Anybody could go in and say they were Jewish. But why would anybody want to do that?

I sobbed, wishing she could see herself in me. My tears were on the carpet, the backs of my hands. My mascara must have been painting my cheeks black. I saw the woman scanning the bookshelf, then her desk. She reached into a drawer and pulled out her handbag, unfastened it, rummaged. I heard the crinkle of a portable tissue packet. She thrust it at me.

“Here. I’m really sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you. It’s just that we have … you know … a lot of ‘Russians’ coming here …”

She left the sentence there as though she assumed I could finish it myself.

My tears stopped. I sniffed. I looked at her, at her bookshelves, at her desk. She resumed talking. She could set up a meeting with the Rabbi, she offered as she walked me back to the lift.

I went home. It was too late to call my mum. I thought of what she would say. I made myself a cup of strong black tea with sugar, ate something. After dinner, I poured myself a whiskey and texted a new friend.

The next day I was at Lauren’s place, where she fed me a bowl of vegetable soup.

“So,” she began, her voice slow and throaty.

She listened to me and nodded. They had experienced both sides. The older two boys, both already graduated, had been to the local primary school and high school. The younger one had gone to the Jewish primary school, then on to the local *gymnasium* like his brothers.

“What did he think?”

“You can ask him yourself,” she replied, grinning as she left the table and hollered upstairs. “Are you hungry? I've made soup!” she called out.

Within seconds I heard the truncated thuds of carpeted treads being taken two at a time.

“Lisa wants to know if you’d recommend the Jewish *Grundschule*?” she called out to him as he ladled soup into his bowl on the other side of the kitchen. He came over and joined us at the table.

“Well I can only speak for myself,” he told me, taking a mouthful. “But yeah, I’m really glad I went. My friends from those years are like family, there’s, you know, a deeper bond, and we’re still really close. The school gave me the basics in Hebrew, in the prayers, the festivals…

“I guess it made being Jewish feel,” he added, “I don’t know.” He grinned. “Normal.”

Twenty minutes later his older brother came home, the middle one. We’d emptied our bowls. Lauren warmed up the pot. He thought the combination would be a good one: a few years in the small, nurturing world of the Jewish school, then into the big, bad German system. He laughed.

“No, it’s good to have both, I’d say.”

The boys excused themselves. Lauren leant forwards on the table, clasping her hands together, one eyebrow raised, silently delivering her message,

“*Nu*, so what are you waiting for?”

It wasn’t so easy. I wanted to be part of it here. I wanted the kids to feel part of it. Simon was German, like her husband. She remembered how it was, right? I was trying so hard to get everything right. The language, the customs, all the bloody rules, how things were done here.

“Why would you do that?” she countered, her face opening and breaking into rich laughter.

“Sure, you gotta learn the language, you pick up a few of the customs, but otherwise…”

She rotated her hands so the palms faced upwards, shrugged, smiled. She stacked the empty bowls and laid the spoons inside, cradling them under her chest and brought them to the sink.

“I’ve lived here for 25 years,” she said, loading the dishwasher. “And you know what? I’ve never worried about that. I’ve always just been myself.”

I picked up our water glasses and carried them over, shaking my head at my reflection in the oven door as I went past.

“Would you like a cup of tea?” Lauren asked me.

I felt the cup warm my hands, my arms and my chest. I told her about my experience at the orthodox *Gemeinde.* She smiled and shrugged.

“You know you can get the school discount if you join our liberal *Shul*, *Beth Shalom.”* I hadn’t known that.

“Yeah, I used to be on the board there,” she said. “It’s a really nice community. Rabbi Tom Kučera is wonderful. The whole family can join. Even your husband, since he’s married to you. They are lots of mixed couples.”

At home that evening, I told Simon. He listened, nodded, ran his hands through his hair so many times it stood up like a quiff of liquorice. I wondered if I should just drop it. I looked at the photo of my mum on the fridge, the one with Lotte on her lap and Milo monkeying beside them. All three faces beamed at me. I thought of her advice. Couldn’t we just try it? The local school wasn’t going anywhere. Simon sighed.

“Once they try it,” he replied, “they’re not going to go back.”

“Well if you think that, then what are we waiting for?” I asked.

“It’s not that simple,” he replied.

****

The next day, after everyone had polished off my spaghetti bolognese and we'd put the kids to bed, I went back into the kitchen. There was still some wine in my glass. The door to the balcony was open. On my way outside, Simon took his hands out of the sink, pulled the tea towel off his shoulder and dried them. A few soap suds fluttered towards me. He took my arms and pulled them around his back, laid his cheek on my neck so I could feel the bristles of his beard against it. Over his shoulder I saw a drawing taped to the wall, one that Lotte had made for me from a stencil. It showed a woman with hair and eyes a bit like mine standing in the pose of a mid-century model, best foot forward, calves and shoulders positioned at appealing angles. On one corner the sticky-tape had failed and the translucent paper was flapping a little dance. I saw how easy it would be for her to fall off the wall.

"Let's try it," Simon whispered in my ear.

"What?" I asked, pulling my head back to look at him. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure," he replied. "I've thought about it a lot, from every angle, well, you know that."

He smiled.

"I've been through all the arguments, again and again, and I think even you agree that they're good arguments. They make sense."

His hands were on my hips.

"But I don't think you can put them on a scale and try to weigh them against what I think this means to you."

I grabbed hold of the kitchen bench.

“This is about you feeling at home here. It’s not just about a school, it’s about identity. Your identity. It’s about something deep inside you that’s really important for you to share with our kids.”

He reached for my hands and pulled them around him.

“There’s really no argument that can stack up against that.”

I didn’t speak. I laid my head against his chest and heard his heartbeat, steady as a clock.

Chapter Twenty Four
Winter, late 2017, Berlin

It was Shabbat. I slipped into the *Chabad Shul* a little late, behind a woman in a *Sheitel.* I followed her down one of the upstairs back rows where there were still a few empty seats, breathing in as I moved, crab-like to her other side. The women’s gallery was almost full. Some had draped shawls of lace or silk over their heads. I was wearing a high-necked, long-sleeved dress that reached to my mid-calves. Its pattern of coloured flowers reminded me of the spring day in Sydney a fortnight after the twins were born, when my eldest son Samuel had celebrated his *Bar Mitzvah.*

Prayer books were passed down the row. The woman beside me offered me one and smiled. Her face was expertly made-up with foundation that matched the flesh-coloured tights that were tucked into her navy blue court shoes. Her shift dress came to under her knees. The hairline above her forehead was neat. Her real hair was hidden under a wig. Alternative versions, with and without headbands, could be seen on a number of women around us. *Chabad* was the only branch of Judaism that recruited new members into its fold; be they lapsed or “new Jews”, as were so many of the “Russians” who had arrived in Germany with little or no knowledge of the religion that had been their ticket here. The community, deeply conservative, was also vibrant, and was said to be thriving.

“It’s very influenced by Russians,” Béa had told me. “By people who are very traditional. Not people who are very openminded and independent. Those are the people we have now in the Jewish community, and that’s why we have such a big revival in organisations

like *Chabad,* which are very orthodox, while the reform synagogues don't have a lot of members. Before '89 we had two synagogues, now we have 12, so you can make your choice. But actually I really don't feel like a part of the wider community. Everybody is Russian. They hardly speak German.

"*Chabad* was ready for them when they came here, really taking them in," she said. "Those people were empty of religion and *Chabad* has a very powerful way, a very good community structure to really involve all kinds of ages and people. My husband's cousins are totally not religious but they are fans of it. There is no room for your own interpretation of how you want to you live your religion. *Chabad* tells you how to do it, no matter what. It gives people a feeling of security."

Benyamin's observation a few days later chimed with hers. "The reason why Russian people become religious here is because they need identity."

After being greeted by almost everyone in the gallery, the woman beside me began to pray. I tucked in my head and tried to do the same but I kept losing my place. She noticed and gently leaned over to point out the right spot.

"Are you new here?" she asked me. "I haven't seen you before."

Her accent was American, testament to where she was born and raised. She had come to live in Berlin with her husband, one of the rabbis. They had five children. The youngest was a newborn. One of the older children was minding him so that she could listen to her eldest son. She nodded towards the *Bimah.*

The *Bar Mitzvah* boy began to sing his *Parasha.* The rabbis swayed, mimicking the ancient ebb and flow of the movements of his voice, which like most *Bar Mitzvah* boys was mid-way through breaking. Its squeaks cried out like false notes on a clarinet, at which the congregation hummed with a communal pride. As the first-born son of a rabbi, there was a strong chance he'd be one of those leading the generations to come. Afterwards he offered his *Haftorah*, adding to it his interpretation of the *Torah* passage he had just recited, whose contents he had closely studied in the year culminating in today. I listened to him tell the story, the one in which Abraham, after having circumcised

himself, is asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac, a test of his faith that is ultimately averted. I gasped.
Vayera. It was the same *Torah* portion Samuel had read on his *Bar Mitzvah*.

"*Mit gute Argumenten kann man sehr viel erreichern*", said the *Bar Mitzvah* boy, articulating an interpretation of Abraham's exchange with God, itself a tenet of Judaism familiar to every Jew in this sanctuary and outside of it. With good arguments you can achieve a lot. The congregation murmured their approval.

The chief rabbi, Teichtal, began his sermon. I had seen his face at close range at events and in press articles, where with his long dark beard, black coat and brimmed hat he featured as a regular alternative to the stock shots of anonymous *Kippah*-clad heads, whenever an article about Jews needed to be illustrated.

"Every time they have an event they always bring Teichtal," Benyamin shrugged when I had asked if he'd noticed the phenomenon. "Because they need someone with a coat and a hat.

"The Germans support the reform movement of Judaism very much, but at the same time they will always look for the 'Jew-looking' guy and perpetuate the stereotype." His thoughts went to a theme key to the poignancy of his photographs.

"The Jew is not just a Jew," he added. "It's an image of something."

The rabbi was warming to his theme now, his voice rising and lilting like a boat pushing forwards with a fresh gust of wind.

"Being Jewish has nothing to do with how you feel or whether you eat *gefilte* fish," he was saying, a comment I took to be aimed at Jews like me.

"Being Jewish has to do with who you are: a descendent of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca and Jacob. A Jew is a Jew is a Jew. That is all. Being the children of Abraham gives us an unbreakable, unending strength that we are the children of God."

I congratulated my neighbour with "*Mazel Tov*" for her son, wished her "*Gut Shabbes*" and left.

****

The “Jewish Culture Days” festival was on after a hiatus of a few years. It wasn’t in summer anymore but in early November. Perhaps that was so that it coincided with the *Kristallnacht* commemorations, I reasoned. The following evening a cabaret billed as a “funny, musical evening” was playing at the Renaissance Theatre in Charlottenburg, close to Savignyplatz where I was staying in west Berlin for the first time. Its title was “*Lerne lachen ohne zu weinen*”. Learn to laugh without crying. I failed that test within the first half hour, when Karsten Troyke came on stage with his violinist, accordionist and double bass. The same troupe that played at our wedding.

I sat in the precipitous third row of the horseshoe-shaped upstairs gallery. My seat, like the whole art deco theatre including the walls, was packed in with the others and upholstered in dusty pink. It felt as close as I would ever get to being back in the womb. An enormous ovular chandelier twinkled overhead. Karsten and his band opened with one of our wedding songs, Leonard Cohen’s *Dance Me To The End of Love.* Except this time he sang it in Yiddish. A Berlin-born theatre journalist was sitting next to me. She and I were among the youngest here by a fair margin.

At the end a dozen performers, singers, musicians, actors, raconteurs, assembled together on stage for the encore, “*Those Were the Days, my Friend*.” We clapped and stamped our feet so hard I worried the chandelier might let loose from the ceiling and fall down on us in tiny fragments. The crowd kept on, they seemed to never want it to end. I let the tears roll off my checks straight into my lap.

The music and the words, the voices and the faces had gone right where they were supposed to. They played my heart strings like an instrument, conjuring that other time, lost, stolen, murdered. For a few hours the performers had brought it back to life, held up the marionette, its painted face shining under the stage lights, its limbs dancing, its mouth moving. When the curtain dropped it would go down too, back into its lifeless box.

Chapter Twenty Five

Earlier that Sunday, a family fun event had been organised as part of the festival. It was held in the Jewish community centre in Fasanenstrasse in west Berlin. *Balagan* Day, it was called, playing on a Hebrew-Russian-Yiddish word familiar even to non-speakers. I had heard it often enough, mostly in the typical formation of, 'What a *Balagan'*, variously referring to the state of my teenage bedroom or some sort of sticky situation my friends and I had got ourselves into.

I arrived hours after it had begun, three days before the 79th anniversary of *Kristallnacht.* I took the steps towards the entrance to a boxy midcentury building fronted by an incongruous Romanesque portal, a remnant of the synagogue built here in 1912. Its monumental style had been inspired by Byzantine architecture, a marker of how Jews in prewar Germany had wished to demonstrate their identification with the collective history and cultural affiliations of their home. On the evening of November 9, 1938 the synagogue was torched and mostly destroyed. Services had stopped two years earlier, a decision that had been considered prudent on account of the growing spectre of Nazism.

Reading brochures at the reception desk on the other side of the security scanner was a shaven-headed man with his back to me. He was wearing a black leather coat, anklelength. Between him and I were the guards, who had just cleared him.

Security waved me through and I made a few steps towards the "chaos", but my gaze was glued askance, towards the man's coat. On it was pictured an eagle in the Third Reich style, its beaked head turned to the right, its wings splayed to reveal the German colours of black, red and gold. Hanging at its throat was a necklace. I pulled at my own gold chain, moving its collection of charms given to me at various times by my mother, aunt, grandmother, my oldest childhood friend and my husband, from left to right, left to right. Hanging on the eagle's necklace was not a swastika, I saw now, but a *Magen David*. Above it, in golden Gothic lettering much favoured by the Nazis, was the word "*Judenfreund*". Below the eagle was a wreath framing a peace sign. I opened my mouth and swung my head back at the security guards, but they showed no sign of alarm.

I carried on, past exhibits pinned to felt boards and rooms where activities were taking place. I climbed the stairs and found myself in a ballroom, reasonably full. As I moved towards the bar, the light caught something golden across the room. I swung my head and saw it was the back of the man's coat, accosting me again. My feet marched over, dragging my body with them. He was alone, leaning against a cocktail table. I saw his face for the first time and reckoned he was a few years older than me, not more. Around his blue eyes were wrinkles made from smiling. His forehead was quite smooth. Despite his baldness and long sandy beard, I could see the boy that had become this man. I opened my mouth again.

"Would it be OK if I asked you something?" I sputtered in German, although as yet I had no idea what my question might be.

"Yes, of course," he replied, "You can ask me anything."

His words and his face were friendly. Wrapped around them were sounds I recognised; the intonations of an English speaker. I grabbed hold of the table, steadying myself against this hodgepodge of signs that conspired to throw me off.

"*Wollen wir auf Englisch oder Deutsch sprechen?*", I continued, playing for time.

Lieber Englisch, he replied, smiling.

"Great," I responded, "That's easier for me too." I blushed. "I'm Australian."

With that, the man threw his arms around me like an old friend, his bushy beard grazing my ear, his lapel greasing my nose.

"I'm from Gosford," he gushed a warm spray that, like his coat, carried the pickled odour of chain-smoked cigarettes. I pulled myself backwards and gaped. The question I had been searching for turned out to be:

"Gosford? Are you serious?"

My mind churned in indigestion: a German-speaking, neo-Nazi-cloaked skinhead from Gosford, New South Wales, about an hour north of where I grew up in Sydney, here before me in Berlin, at *Balagan* Day, an event otherwise frequented by *Alter Kackers* making paper chains, middle-aged *Schlemiels* in slacks scoffing as much as they could before their wives confiscated their plates and *Yiddishe* mamas cheering their children's dance routines.

His hands were already clenched, with the death's heads and Stars of David imprinted on the silver rings he wore on each finger, ready to fist bump mine. "My name's Skull," he told me, still grinning.

I attempted a smile. My eyes moved to the bottle green tattoos on each side of his shaven head, whose motifs I couldn't make out. I looked around. Nobody seemed to be paying attention to us.

"Are you well-known around here?" I asked.

"Yeah, people know me a bit," he replied. "I'm surprised I haven't bumped into people I know yet."

He took a swig of the room. I gestured to a table, where we sat down between assorted families.

"I've never had a bad reaction from a Jewish person. People talk to me at Jewish functions and Jewish days. I get treated here no different from anyone else."

"Why do you come?"

"I come because I have become a total, atheistic, philo-Semite." He grinned. "Yeah, I should probably explain how that happened."

"I'm all ears," I replied, settling into my Aussie comfort zone.

“You can thank *Mutti* Merkel for it,” he began, using the colloquial moniker that describes how Germany’s Chancellor personifies Germany’s collective “mother” with the baked-in sense of “I’ll take care of you” as well as “I know what’s good for you”.

“Yeah, you know in 2015, ‘*Wir schaffen das,* he continued, using as shorthand her oftquoted phrase “We’ll manage it” to reference her controversial decision to allow into Germany around a million unverified Syrian and other refugees, beginning in September 2015.

“As a consequence of that, Islam became a big topic in Germany,” Skull continued.

“So I started researching Islam. I wanted to read the Koran and find out for myself what was going on there. I got some authorised English translations. I read them all.”

He made some savage comments about the Koran’s contents that sounded slanderous to me.

“For over two and a half decades I had believed the Pali propaganda.” He used a shorthand for Palestinians I hadn’t heard before. “And I was an absolute Jew-hater. But in the winter of ’15/’16 I started doing research on the Jewish people.”

He banged his hands on the table so hard I thought his rings might dent it, as he shouted,

“Well fuck me dead, the Jews really are the most persecuted people in all of fuckin’ history!” Our table companions looked up from their cheesecake.

“It’s still going on and it’s never going to end.” The whites of his eyes were crisscrossed with veins.

“Look, I’m an atheist. But from a political, sociopolitical, human, psychological, historical perspective I can understand how it happened. I did a 180-degree swing, from totally anti-Israel I became totally pro-Israel.”

I tried to focus on taking down his words. I had heard often enough that philo-Semitism and anti-Semitism were two sides of the same coin. After a screening of a documentary

called *Germans and Jews* in Munich earlier in the year, the moderator had pointed to a line from the film,

“Philo-Semitism is almost as dangerous as anti-Semitism.”

Her interviewee at this small event was not one of the filmmakers but a local personality, Louis Lewitan, whom I met again months later at a mutual friend’s party. Another sign, I surmised, of the insularity of the community in my adopted city.

Lewitan responded with a scholarly version of the common wisdom:

“As a psychologist, I think it’s easy to interpret: You should beware of being idealised. If you’re placed on a platform, of course, it’s very easy to invite someone to stumble off the platform … Then very quickly from the idealisation we have contempt through devaluation.”

Skull pulled at his coat lapels, opening them up for me.

“I have two of these black t-shirts.” He pointed to his chest. “I sewed Israeli flags onto them. I wear them on top of my other clothes. This is my uniform. I’m not seen outside of my building without it.”

He leaned forward and laid his hand over my notebook.

“Skull Judenfreund,” he tapped the page with his forefinger. *Judenfreund.* Friend of Jews.

“I like using insults as badges of pride and honour,” he smiled. That’s why I chose the name *Judenfreund*, because in the Third Reich you would have got arrested for that. I used that deliberately.”

His blue eyes moved diagonally upwards to the place where, I remembered from undergraduate psychology class, we retrieve cognitive information.

“Remember the Christmas market attacks at Breitscheidplatz last year?” he asked rhetorically. “I went there on the 24th of December to pay my respects. And the police picked me up and took me into custody. Freezing cold. They made me strip down to my

underwear. Harassed me. Stupid, narrow-minded. They see a white tattooed baldie; he must be a Nazi."

His gaze met mine.

"It's just an unfortunate coincidence that I like this look. But it has taught me so much about narrow-mindedness. Including – excuse me – including yours."

I nodded slowly.

"Six months later I got a letter from the cops to say that the investigation had now been dropped, because of *verminderte Schuld*."

Schuld. Guilt. Debt. In a language whose terminology usually tends towards over-precision, I reflected again on this curious doubling up.

"I started wearing this on March 11, 2016," he pointed to his get-up. "Immediately the reaction was death stares. Especially from Muslims.

"I'm anti-Islam but I'm not Islamophobic," he continued without pausing to explain the difference. "I've got Muslim mates. My mate Momo was standing out the front of my building that day.

"He said *"Shalom"* as I walked past. He started speaking Hebrew, but I said I don't speak it. I explained that I'm not Jewish."

He stopped, not for the first time, to cough up some smoker's phlegm, then swallowed it again. On the stage behind us a young girl was singing a pop song in Hebrew.

"He told me that was *gefährlich*," said Skull, using the German word for dangerous.

What other reactions do you get?

"People where we live are more used to me now. They call me '*Judenfreund-Hurrensohn'*, friend of Jews, son of a whore."

“I live in Moabit, right across the road from a mosque. It’s a liberal mosque. She’s a female Imam and she has a lot of angry people there; she gets death threats. I live half a mile from the refugee camps. So in my neighbourhood there’s a lot of Muslims.”

His vowels twanged like banjo strings.

“Of course I don’t understand Arabic, but I understand words when they’re spat out like ‘*Yehudi’*, ‘*Israel-Scheisse’* and ‘*Scheisse Jude’*,” he said, making his own guttural spray as he twice said the German word for “shit”, some of which landed on my arm.

“My first friend in Germany was a Jew called Atar. He lives in a social housing flat. He gave me a nice reaction. He was born in the Palestinian mandate and calls himself Ali, but he’s Jewish. And he’s shit scared of anyone finding out.

“Moabit and Wedding and Neukölln,” he continued, listing Berlin neighbourhoods wellknown for their Arab, north African and Turkish populations. “They are full of anti-Semites, anti-Zionists.”

I looked up and his eyes perforated mine. “We both know there is no difference. It’s anti-Semitism or it’s latent anti-Semitism.” He exhaled.

“I’ve never had any Nazis come up to me and harass me. All the Jew-hatred, all the open anti-Semitism I’ve had has come from Muslims.” His rings tapped the table.

“The latent anti-Semitism I’ve experienced comes from ordinary Germans. From ‘nice, tolerant Germans’,” he clarified, his sarcasm thick. “Germans who tell me the Muslims are good people but Israel is fucked. That the Israelis murder children. Et cetera.” He leaned forward on the table.

“What I think is that they’re sick of feeling guilty. Because of the guilt that they ‘have to feel’. It’s this weird combination. Whether it’s purposeful or coincidental, if Israel is ‘guilty’ of all these crimes then it relieves them of their guilt.

“They always say to me, ‘You’re not allowed to say anything against Muslims, because that’s how the Holocaust started’.” He guffawed in disbelief.

“There is an absolute irony of how they’re relieving their guilt.”

In Australia he had completed a Bachelor of Computer Science. After that he’d started a Bachelor of Arts in French and German, but he had quit.

He excused himself to go outside for a cigarette. I tried to imagine how his words might strike me if they had been voiced from another mouth. The mouth of somebody who wasn’t wearing that coat. His testimony about what he’d experienced or witnessed in the area where he lived was the first I had heard from somebody with daily exposure to it. Even if elements of exaggeration suited his cause, if I had heard him in a courtroom I would have said he was a compelling witness.

“You know, I was born here, in Berlin,” Skull was back.

“You were born in Berlin?”

“Yep. I have German citizenship. I came here to meet my biological ‘M’,” he said making quotation marks around it with his fingers. “I won’t use the ‘M” word,” he explained.

“My biological ‘parents’ are German. And my adoptive parents are German. They moved to Australia when I was a kid. They said, ‘Let’s move to the arse-end of the world’.”

We laughed and I felt the stirrings of empathy.

“When I came back here, I thought, three to six months, tops. Absolute maximum, nine months. And I’m telling you that story 16 years later.”

For the first time in our conversation his eyes welled with tears. “Yeah, I’m staying here.”

A few days later, early on Friday evening, he sent me an SMS,

“*Shabbat Shalom,* sweet southern Semite! ;-).” Now it was my eyes that clouded over.

Chapter Twenty Six

The following Friday afternoon I met Benyamin at the Literaturhaus on Fasanenstrasse, a few doors down from where the liberal synagogue – opened in 1912, closed by the Nazis in 1936 and, at the personal directive of Joseph Goebbels, destroyed on *Kristallnacht* – used to be.

We sat down at a corner table in its cafe that could have been a Viennese *Kaffeehaus* with its dark furniture and lavish cakes in vitrines. Like everybody else, we ordered coffee and strudel.

Four months earlier, in September 2017, Angela Merkel had been reinstated as Chancellor in the German federal election, a task she appeared to have taken on with a sense of duty more than of desire. Martin Schulz, the SPD candidate and former president of the European parliament, was obliterated. The newly formed AfD, emboldened by polarised reactions to Merkel's open border policy of 2015, comfortably cleared the 5 per cent threshold for parliamentary representation with a Germany-wide share of 12.6 per cent of the vote.

Two years after a million refugees had arrived in Germany, politicians were trumpeting new statistics that suggested the annual figure of registered asylum seekers in Germany had dropped to just under 200,000. It was hard to tell what such a figure might mean. Reports conflicted wildly. How many border points remained open, what proportion of refugees were being officially recorded, how many had stayed or left, remained moot points.

Benyamin rested his chin on his hands as he described his initial reaction to Merkel's gesture in late 2015.

"At the time, I looked at it in a humanistic way. I was proud that she said yes," he said. "Even if the memory of the Holocaust helped her make this decision and she saw it as a chance."

"A chance for redemption, you mean?" I asked.

“Yes,” he replied.

“And this humanistic spirit is what I think a Jewish tradition should be today,” Benyamin continued. “That’s the idea of Judaism. To be socially aware and be open to the needs of others. If we have the power now. The Jews in the ghetto didn’t have any power. Now we have the moral imperative.”

He pushed up the sleeves of his cardigan and folded his arms.

“Yeah, I was really pro, I thought Merkel was a kind of a saint.” He paused to meet my eyes. “But I changed my mind.”

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In January 2016, four months after the refugees had been allowed into Germany, I mentioned to Béa the conundrum that this gesture of goodwill seemed to present for so many Jews here, somewhere between, as Benyamin described it, the concept of *Tikkun Olam* that is central to Judaism, and the fear, inescapable as a Jew, of anti-Semitism.

“I think Jewish people here don’t have anything against the refugees in particular,” said Béa. “But they worry that a lot of people are coming with the wrong intentions, that bad people are coming.”

She took a sip of tea. “But that’s the fear that everybody has when refugees come.

“Personally, I didn’t have a big problem with it, but my husband, for example, he’s freaking out.” She lowered her voice to a whisper. “Our daughter is not supposed to go out on the streets anymore, ‘It’s not safe, it’s really ambivalent’.

“I don’t know why we have very different ideas about it …”

Half a floor below in their split-level townhouse, Greg was watching a movie with the kids. We could hear the soundtrack wafting upstairs with its orchestral flourishes designed to stir the emotions.

Béa’s face broke open. “See, now he comes closer …”

She turned her head. With the light from downstairs behind him it was his eyes I saw first, two dark circles dancing with curiosity, making their way towards us.

All three of us laughed.

“You want to speak for yourself?” I jested.

“I wanna listen!” said Greg, sitting down with us, his flannel trousers under the table, his royal blue sweater above, his reading glasses pushed up onto the top of his head.

“We were just talking about the refugees, about the divide in the community …” I explained.

“There’s a reason to feel concerned,” said Greg, who was born in Casablanca in 1965, where he had his *Bris* before moving to Berlin at 10 days old with his family. Five years later they emigrated to the US.

“What’s the reason?” I asked him.

Greg exhaled deeply. “I think when you want to help somebody then there should be a plan. You hear already daily that people are disappearing, that they’re leaving these refugee camps and nobody knows where they are, nobody knows who they are.” He pounded the table.

“I admire my wife for thinking the way she does – she is always so positive – but I just don’t believe that they have this under control. They can’t contain them. They can’t send them back. There’s more coming. I think we’re living at a very dangerous time in Europe.

“It’s definitely a reason to be scared, I think,” he added.

“As a Jew in particular?” I asked.

“As a minority and also as a Jew,” he replied. “You have this ideology … we’re not talking about all of them, but the majority, they’ve grown up to hate us.

One of Béa's arms was stretched over the neighbouring chair. Her other hand was pushed up against her cheek. "People have so many preconceptions in their heads. About Jews, about the refugees."

I mentioned how I'd read that Josef Schuster, the head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, had met with Angela Merkel to clarify concerns about elements of the refugees bringing with them virulent anti-Semitism.

"It seemed like, when she made her decision, that had not occurred to her," I remarked.

Béa uncrossed her arms. "No. Why should it? She's not Jewish."

"But politicians like her, they're supposed to be so engaged with the community…?" I queried.

"But they're not," she replied. "They're not really engaged."

****

In Hamburg a couple of weeks later, Robert offered me another point of view.

"I thought it was fair enough. We're one of the wealthiest countries in the world, why not?

"For the economy of course, it's a plus. It's a restructuring of the society. One million more or less migrants, come on. We have to calm down a bit.

"Migration is something which has been in the human heritage forever. It's a dynamic process that has to be handled by the people. Some people might become radicalised. But this is the only way. There was no other solution but opening up the gates.

"If we closed the gates," he opened his hands. "I don't think the atmosphere would be any better."

****

In the Literaturhaus with Benyamin nearly two years later, I complimented him on how well he appeared in his finely woven cardigan, his white shirt with its mandarin collar highlighting the glow of his complexion. Three of his photographs now hung in the Jewish Museum in Munich.

“You’re looking a lot more bourgeois than when we met a few years ago,” I teased him gently.

“Yes, I like the bourgeois comfort,” he replied with an open smile. He was settled now in west Berlin with a steady boyfriend, the descendent of an original *Jekke*, a polyglot who hadn’t known a word of Hebrew before they met and was now learning to speak it fluently.

I was struck by how few Israelis I encountered in Charlottenburg, with its memories bumping into me on every other corner, like the *Stolpersteine* that seemed much more prevalent on this side of town. In Kreuzberg in the former east Berlin where I’d stayed last time, you could hardly sneeze without running into an Israeli, or a Palestinian, I added, only half-jokingly.

“The young Israelis come here to forget their Jewishness; their Israeli-ness,” remarked Benyamin, the usual lilt of his voice flattened. “They turn their heads in the metro when people speak Hebrew. And that’s how they like it.”

With his hand Benyamin pushed his floppy black hair from one side of his forehead to the other.

“When I arrived here in 2009, it was still the left-wing Israelis who came here to rebel against their parents and the state; to get away from the Israeli army. Now a lot come for commercial reasons. Investors. Or to have fun, to live cheap, to party.

“For me it was for sure to run away and forget.” His eyes were half-closed.

“Berlin is a place for lost souls. Everyone can come here and find a *Mutti*. But a German mother doesn’t really hug you. You don’t get a lot of emotions. You don’t need to give too much either. This is very central to what this city is. There is all this memory, all this history.”

We'd finished our coffee and cake. Only a few crumbs were left on our plates.

"I needed a place where I could just lay down and forget," he said, leaning back into the comfort of our leather-clad corner seat. "The more I live here, the more it becomes hard to define, what it means to live here, because it becomes deeper, it has more layers.

"There is always this question: 'How is it to be an Israeli in Berlin?'. I resisted it for a long time, but then I thought, 'That's the right question'. His eyes showed the thoughts that swirled behind them.

"Somehow I'm just trying to pass through," his voice was soft. "Between the drops of rain."

PART FOUR

Chapter Twenty Seven
Spring 2018, Berlin

"*Yehudi*," spat one of a trio of young men on a street corner in Prenzlauerberg, the Berlin neighbourhood where you were more likely to spot a pram-pushing yuppie than a beltwielding anti-Semite.

But there he was, pulling the belt off his jeans as he approached a pair of men wearing *Kippahs*, one of whom pulled out his phone and recorded his assailant as he whipped and insulted him.

The footage went viral. There was a court case. The assailant was a 17-year-old Syrian refugee.

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Late summer, 2018, Munich

In the kitchen at home I prepared myself a cup of tea. I watched the sugar dance in circles until it dissolved. It was sunny outside. At the rally in Jakobsplatz outside the trio of school, synagogue, museum, the crowd had made their choices between sweltering in the orbit of the stage or standing back in the shade. Only a few wore "solidarity" *Kippahs*.

The politicians, the clergy, the commentators, Protestants and Catholics, made their speeches in the harmonising tones of consensus. The Jewish leaders echoed the chorus with mixed notes of defiance and fear. A pair of nuns from the church across the square stood beside me in the blazing sun, still as statues in their habits.

Charlotte Knobloch quoted Leo Baeck, the wartime reform rabbi who was head of the *Judenrat* in Theresienstadt, the "model" concentration camp. As such he had presided

over the deportation lists, a crushing task that also meant he had been able to safeguard his family. After the war he moved to London, from where, Knobloch reminded us, he announced,

“Jewish life in Germany is over.”

She went on to speak of the 11 Israeli athletes murdered by pro-Palestinian terrorists during the 1972 Olympic Games at the Olympia Park just 15 minutes from where we stood.

She didn’t mention by name the leader of the AfD, Alexander Gauland, who three months earlier had declared:

"Hitler and the Nazis are just a speck of birdshit in more than 1,000 years of successful German history.”

A liberal politician trotted out the usual statistic, asserting that 91 per cent of anti-Semitic attacks in Germany were attributable to the far right. I folded my arms across my chest and looked around. Everybody knew about the anti-Semitism that came also from elements of the Muslim or Arabic population. We had all heard accounts of Jews being spat on, threatened, insulted, having their *Kippahs* knocked off their heads, their necklaces pulled from their throats, their faces bashed in public. Some, including the recent beltwhipping in Berlin with its media-friendly footage, were broadcast and must have been reported to the police, although they seemed to make little impression on the statistics.
Others were only spoken about in whispers.

The *Cantor* from *Beth Shalom* sang a haunting melody with the opera singer’s baritone he’d brought from his birthplace of Belgrade. I felt the urge to rush onstage and beseech him to break into *Hava Nagila.* I would join the hands of these hundreds of people, the Jews and the gentiles standing on the square, so we could turn around it in circles of celebration instead of the static solemnity that made this “solidarity rally” feel like a funeral. Anti-Semitism was here in Germany. There was no denying it. But Leo Baeck was wrong. We were here too. And we were alive.

I cycled home and opened the door to our balcony, which faced south to the afternoon sun. Those two square metres behind our kitchen, our only outdoor space, faced the back balconies of at least 20 neighbouring apartments. It reminded me of the set of the opera *Carmen*, with pot plants and washing hanging precipitously. Sometimes elbows rested on ledges while people called out to each other, their conversations bouncing around for all to hear. Mostly people kept to themselves, sneaking a mouthful of muesli or a sip of tea as I did now, with their gazes set into the middle distance as though to not see was to not be seen.

As I reached out to a pillowcase hanging on the line I saw beside it, pegged like a flag, a silver Star of David embroidered into a dark circle of velvet. Milo's school *Kippah*. Its texture reminded me of the fur of an animal after the rain. Inside, the washing machine hummed at me from the pantry. I hurriedly laid it there, my heart pounding as I called out to Simon through the kitchen and down the corridor. He was in the living room supervising the kids' homework.

"What were you thinking," I demanded, throat tightening, tears forming. He looked at me blankly.

"Milo's *Kippah* … on the washing line?" I wailed.

"Oh, that," he replied. "His drink bottle spilled in his bag."

He tilted his head. "It got wet." His furrowed smile advertised his bemusement.

I pulled a face. "Are you going to make me spell this out?"

His expression was gentle. In his eyes I saw an innocence, an ease, a whole planet between us.

"Don't you understand, it's like a sign informing our neighbours, 'Look, Jews live here!'," I cried.

"And?" he replied. "What's wrong with that?"

****

Lotte and Milo had been at the Jewish school for a year. After a week's trial they had been very happy to stay. As they went about their everyday tasks at home, playing in their room, doing their homework, taking their bath, they sang Hebrew songs at the tops of their voices.

They were now in the third class, the year when students who take Ethics class in the state system learn about Judaism. One of their new classmates had recently left to go to a local primary school out of town, closer to where his family lived. At a birthday party I chatted with his dad, a Jewish doctor who was born in Germany and had spent much of his adolescence in Israel. After five years, including pre-school at the Jewish school, his son had sat for the first time among other German kids, not Jewish, who were about to learn about Judaism, Islam and other "world religions". In the first lesson, the teacher had given a brief overview of each, before recapping,

"So, the Catholics and the Protestants and the Muslims and the…" She had paused long enough for the class to note the extended silence. "And the Jews," she eventually continued, before adding, as she flipped over the page in her heavy ring-bound folder.

"Yes, well, that's enough of the Jews."

One afternoon I picked up Lotte and Lea, her friend from *Hort* on the way home from the ballet class they still took together. Lea turned to Lotte, her eyes shining, and proudly told her that now she knew all about Judaism. They had learned it at school.

I turned to her as we walked, trying to keep my own eyes from widening too emphatically.

"Oh, that's nice," I said. "What did you learn?"

"Well," began Lea, "We learned that the men have to wear the skullcap and the little strings that hang over their trousers, and they wrap this long black cord made of leather around their arms with a little black box on their foreheads…"

I raised an eyebrow.

“And the women shave their heads and wear wigs and they stay at home having lots of children.”

I frowned. “Well, those are things only very orthodox people do,” I tried to explain. “Didn’t they tell you about other types of Jews? You know that I’m Jewish and we don’t…”

She had already grabbed Lotte’s arm. The pair of them skipped ahead towards Friederike’s shop. Although they were not displayed in the window, she now stocked New Year’s cards for *Rosh Hashanah*, which was just a few days away. Her customers loved to buy them, she told me, whether they were Jewish or not.

****

One Saturday evening a few weeks later, I booked tickets to see a new German film, *Werk Ohne Autor* about the haunting post-war experiences of an artist inspired by the German painter Gerhard Richter, who was born in 1932. The film was said to be excellent, and three hours long. Lotte wasn’t convinced about our new babysitter, so Simon and I got out of the house late. We rode our bikes to three restaurants before we found a table at *Ella* in the *Lenbachhaus* art gallery where we scoffed pasta and red wine.

I tucked my dress under the saddle of my city bicycle so it wouldn’t get caught in its slim wheels and followed behind Simon’s mountain bike, whose thick tyres powered ahead. He chose the circular route around the Königsplatz, the imposing square modelled on the Acropolis in Athens that was constructed in the 19th century at the behest of King Ludwig of Bavaria. A century later it was a key site of Hitler’s mass rallies. The wind in my ears whipped up the sounds of the crowds, “*Juden Raus*!” In 1933 two book burnings had taken place here. Around the corner on Briennerstrasse was the Brown House, the national headquarters of the Nazi party.

In 1947 the American army destroyed much of the Nazis’ architecture, including the pair of “Honour Temples” where the 16 Nazis killed in the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch had been interred as martyrs to the cause. But some structures, not all of which pre-dated the Nazis, remained.

The roundabout that encircles the *Doric Propylaea* or city gate is covered with gravel of uneven consistency known in Germany as *Kiez.* As I came around the corner, struggling to keep pace with my husband, four men emerged from a taxi and approached me in formation. I felt the wheels of my bike swerve under me. The right side of my face was first to hit the *Kiez* as I went down. I saw stars. My blood was already mixing in with the stones. The throbbing of my cheek, knees and heart was so intense I couldn't speak. One of the men told me not to worry, he was a doctor, as he shone his torch into my eyes.

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November 2018, Berlin

At 10.57 on the morning of 9 November 2018, Angela Merkel arrived at the Rykestrasse synagogue in Prenzlauerberg in the former east Berlin, a few streets away from where two young men wearing *Kippahs* had been attacked six months earlier. Built in 1903, the synagogue was said to be one of the most beautiful in Europe.

Police guarded three cordoned off entrance points. Béa had given me special I.D. and a temporary post helping her team deal with registrations for the event, which was called, the "Central Commemoration Ceremony for the 80th anniversary of the Third ReichPogrom-Night". *Kristallnacht* had long since been renamed as such in Germany.

The 1000-seat *Shul* was packed. On *Shabbat* services, one of the volunteers whispered to me, they could hardly fill a few rows. I found a spot on the side, towards the back. The original arches and fretwork on the walls must have been hewn by stonemasons. In the reconstruction, partly funded by the German government, they had been painted back on. The dome behind the pulpit glowed with purple stage lighting.

Merkel, her voice as black as her clothing, began to talk about the Holocaust. "Words fail me here. It was singular," she said. "On the night of November 9, 80 years ago the synagogue was plundered, destroyed and set on fire.

“We live in a time in which the eyewitnesses of this terrible period of German history are dying,” she added. “In this phase it will be decided whether we have really learned from history.

We all rose for the *Kaddish*, the prayer for the dead that we recite every week on *Shabbat* and, most, poignantly, each year on *Yom Kippur.* Together with the other Jews I spoke the words I’d learned for my *Bat Mitzvah* and repeated every year on my father’s and grandparents’ *Jahrzeits.* Our combined voices made no more than a murmur in a place that felt to me more like a chimera than a synagogue, in which the vast majority remained silent.

“Jewish life is blossoming again in Germany, an unexpected gift to us after the *Shoah*,” Merkel proclaimed immediately before she issued the warning: “But we are also witnessing a worrying anti-Semitism that threatens Jewish life in our country.”

Béa’s husband Greg was watching the live telecast of the event from home. Moments before the 11am screening, the German state broadcaster ZDR had televised a news bulletin that reported, without context, that neo-Nazis had won the democratic right to protest on November 9.

Later that afternoon, another ceremony was held at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which occupies an entire city block near the Bundestag. Lea Rosh, whose advocacy was pivotal in the construction of the controversial monument, was on stage with dignitaries and politicians when a representative of the *AfD* approached to join them on the podium.

The previous month, a tiny but symbolically potent group who called themselves “Jews for the *AfD*” had been launched to much fanfare in the press and much consternation among other Jews.

The 82-year-old Rosh used her body to block his way. “As long as members of your party continue to refer to this memorial as ‘a monument to our shame’, you will not stand here with us.”

Chapter Twenty Eight
Winter, early 2019, Munich

“In this house lived the following victims of Nazi terror:

Rela Hönigsmann
Max Mahler

“For whom we would like to lay *Stolpersteine*.

“*Stolpersteine* are 10 x 10cm brass plates upon which the personal details of victims of the Nazi regime are engraved. They would be embedded into the footpath as a visible reminder of the fates of former residents of this building.

“The Cologne artist Gunter Demnig has been working on the *Stolpersteine* project since 1992. During this time around 73,000 memorial stones have been laid by hand in 1600 cities and communities in Germany and 25 other countries.

“Often at the request of house owners or residents, the initiative *Stolpersteine für München* has succeeded in laying 90 *Stolpersteine* at 29 locations.”

The letter I had just retrieved from our mailbox was printed on a single sheet of A4. It shook in my hand as I carried it up the four flights of stairs to our doorway. I sat on the bench where we put our shoes on and took them off and tried to absorb what I’d read.

I dropped the rest of the mail, closed the door with my foot and dashed to my computer. Like my *Buba*, Rela Hönigsmann was born in *Lvov*, also known as Lviv or Lemberg. She had been an artist of the “Munich School”. Her paintings, typical of that group, featured mostly interior scenes and could still be bought at auction. As I studied her compositions, a thought beckoned me. I picked up my laptop and carried it through the “wing doors” that connected every room of our apartment. The creaky oak parquetry was original. So

were the stucco ceilings and the windows. My eyes moved back and forth from the images on my screen to the features right before me. They matched.

Max Mahler, born in Bamberg, had been a legal counsel. He had lived downstairs on the first floor. I couldn't find any information on where either Rela or Max had gone, whether into hiding, exile or deportation and most likely, death. My fears as to their fates mixed up with a warmth that spread from my heart to my throat and over my cheeks: Jews had lived here, right where I stood and slept.

I wrote to Terry Swartzberg, the letter's author and advocate for finding creative ways to install *Stolpersteine* in Munich, where they had been banned on public property at the behest of Charlotte Knobloch, head of the Jewish community in Munich and Upper Bavaria, herself a Holocaust survivor. I had heard of Terry, although we hadn't yet met. I knew he was a member of our *Shul.* He was well-known in the community for wearing a *Kippah* everywhere he went. He wrote back within minutes, inviting me over for lunch at his home-office the following day. My eyes moved to the signature line at the base of his email: "Campaigns healing, enlightening and enthralling the world".

At his terrace house on a hill, Terry welcomed me as though we were old friends. Two research assistants helping him with projects in South Sudan – one to give reporters a global platform, the other to alert the world to the polluted water supply – joined us for a lunch of vegetable curries served with mind-blowingly hot chutney. Terry had spent his adolescence in India with his family, whom he described as typical New York Jews of a certain type: creative, philanthropic, more or less secular. He was at a Jesuit boarding school when he was 13, so he hadn't been *Bar Mitvah*-ed. It was in Germany, over the last four decades, that he had become actively engaged with his Jewishness.

"That's not unusual," he offered with his infectious grin. "When there's a vacuum there's also a strong urge to fill it."

He had celebrated his *Bar Mitzvah* almost a decade ago, he told me proudly, with Rabbi Tom at *Beth Shalom*, at the age of 59.

After lunch we went upstairs to his office. His desk, like the whole house, was empty of everything other than what was essential to work and to live. A single object lay across

the expanse of polished timber from his computer, a block of concrete 10cm x 10cm x about 20cm whose top was covered with a layer of brass. A *Stolpersteine*, ready to be implanted on private land in Munich.

Stolpersteine were banned in only three places where the artist wished to install them: Linz in Austria; a small town in eastern Germany, and Munich. Knobloch didn't approve of the memories of dead Jews being stepped on by passersby, I had heard. She found it disrespectful. But wasn't stepping on them the point? I asked Terry. Wasn't Gunther Demnig's idea that the very act of doing so would conjure the reflection among passersby that these victims had lived in among us in ways as everyday as walking, sometimes even stumbling, along the street?

Terry nodded, then shook his head.

"If we can find a place to install the *Stolpersteine* at your building, with the landlord's permission, then we can bypass the law by doing so on private land."

He opened Google Earth on his computer and scanned our corner *Altbau* apartment block, moving the perspective again and again around its facade, which gave directly onto the footpath.

He shook his head again. "It's a shame, but I really can't see anywhere they could go."

On Terry's bald head was a brightly coloured *Kippah.* He had a collection that now numbered 100. In 2012, he had been wearing one of them when he attended the funeral of a Jewish friend. As is customary in Jewish cemeteries, all the men were wearing *Kippahs*. As soon as they passed the gates to the street, they pulled them off their heads and put them away in their pockets.

Terry wondered at this and spontaneously decided to keep his on for the rest of the day. He went about his usual business. Nothing untoward happened. He decided to continue for a week, then a month, and a year. Until now, he hasn't stopped.

One day, he visited his local greengrocer, whose proprietor, as at many other such shops around the city, was Muslim. As Terry walked in he concentrated on keeping his smile on megawatt mode. When he got to the counter, the owner glanced at his head covering.

“Ours are bigger than yours,” he quipped.

We chuckled. Terry looked at me meaningfully. “And in all the years since I’ve never been harassed, never been spat on, never been attacked.

“Everybody said I was crazy, that somebody would come and knock it off my head.” His dark eyes twinkled from behind his rimless glasses.

“But they were all wrong.”

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Spring 2019, Munich

The flowers blossoming on our street were so abundant they made a yellow carpet under my feet. My footsteps released tiny particles that made my eyes water so much it looked like I was crying.

One evening I caught the tram to Karlsplatz. Down a dank corridor and up a staircase to a set of small rooms was the opening of an exhibition about contemporary Jewish life in Germany attended by around 20 people. A panel of four young Jews was convened, one of whom was Levi, the 35-year-old co-director of the Jewish high school that was housed in the same building as the primary school, where he also gave lessons. I realised he was Lotte’s Hebrew teacher.

Afterwards I introduced myself. In his hand Levi held a black fedora. Clipped to his light brown hair was a *Kippah.*

“Since I’ve been working at the school, they have been telling me not to wear my *Kippah* openly in public,” he told me. “That’s significant, because it’s a Jewish institution telling me to be cautious.”

He smiled gently. “To be fair, when I’m out and about with my *Yarmulke* on, things happen.

“Anywhere I am, there are people trying to engage me in conversations that I’m not interested in having. It’s across the board anti-Israel stuff, but also classic anti-Semitic stereotypes – money, controlling the banks, etcetera.”

I tried to envisage him how he might appear to a stranger. On his thin frame he wore black jeans, a shirt with its top button done up and a waistcoat that might have been vintage, like the pair of brown brogues on his feet. On his face was a soft beard the same colour as his hair, and a pair of tortoiseshell eyeglasses.

Is there a particular demographic? I asked him.

“It depends where you are in Germany. When I go to Munster and to Dortmund there are Nazis. In Dusseldorf where I studied, it was mostly Arabic people, and here in Munich it’s mostly Bavarian people harassing me. Older people. But not only them, people in their 40s and 50s too.

Levi was born and grew up in a small town in northern Germany. The local Jewish community consisted of 30 members. Once a month there was a *Shabbat* service. His grandparents survived the Holocaust by moving to the UK. They returned after the war. Levi knew no more than that he was Jewish until an uncle from America arranged for him and his siblings to have weekly Hebrew tuition, including some explication of religious precepts and traditions. He began at the age of seven. His two siblings, considerably older and younger than him, were ambivalent. With Levi, it stuck. He practises a conservative form of progressive Judaism known as *Masorti*. He keeps kosher, observes *Shabbat*, and remains open.

The atmosphere of hate created by the *AfD* was emboldening people to express themselves without fear, he told me. The idea that Jews, whether German-born or not, are “foreign” was gaining currency, hand in hand with the idea of being “*bio-Deutsch*”, a heavily loaded term being increasingly deployed to denote the idea of “German ethnicity”.

“So you’re just minding your own business, walking down the street, sitting in a cafe, waiting at a tram stop and people come up to you and start…?” I prompted.

“Yes. Typically when I’m using any form of public transportation or when I’m at the supermarket. People see you or are waiting with you, these are the typical situations.

“It’s public space and you’re vulnerable.”

“People just pass you by. You see them just for a second, they can yell at you and then just leave.”

How often do other people intervene to help you, I asked,

“Almost never,” he replied. “And when they do, they’re usually visitors from abroad.”

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A week later, Felix Klein, the newly appointed federal anti-Semitism commissioner, gave a quote in a newspaper interview that made local and international headlines.

“I cannot advise Jews to wear the *Kippah* everywhere, all the time, in Germany.”

Epilogue
September/October 2019, Munich

I set six places at the *Shabbas* table. My mum, who'd flown in from Sydney at 6am, was in the kitchen making her famous chopped liver. As the sun dipped behind the trees, she and I lit the candles with Lotte and Lucia. I poured the *Kiddush* wine into its silver cup for the adults. Milo began walking carefully towards me, his fair curls bouncing, his eyes fixed on my childhood *Kiddush* cup that I'd filled with grape juice. When he reached the head of the table he placed it down beside me, carefully releasing it from his fingers. His khaki eyes beamed as he asked,

"Mama, can I sing the *Kiddush* with you?"

He knew all the words now by heart, where to lower and to raise his voice, when it was time for the others to join in with us and say, "*Amen*".

On Sunday the six of us went to *Shul* for *Rosh Hashanah.* We joined the congregation afterwards for a festive dinner. Lotte had baked a honey cake with my mum and I, as is traditional to signify a sweet new year ahead.

Ten days later, on 8 October, the eve of *Yom Kippur,* I ate an early dinner with my mum before sunset in preparation for the 24 hours of fasting ahead. The doorbell rang. Lucia, who had finished high school and was sub-letting an apartment from a friend before she set off on her gap year, was at the door dressed in white, as is customary.

"Are you coming to *Shul* with us?" I asked, my eyes widening. Although I had filled out an application for her at the time we all joined, she hadn't yet been there.

"I want to be with you and Gaga," she replied.

I put one arm around my mum and reached for Lucia's hand as we walked towards the synagogue, joining others along the way. We smiled at the security guards at the gate, wished them well over the fast, and carried on towards the entrance where the police officers were stationed, as the setting sun guided us tenderly with the last of the day's light.

The *Kol Nidre* service is hauntingly beautiful. Every seat in the *Shul* was occupied. As we sang the refrains of *Avinu Malkeinu*, our voices growing softer with each verse, my mum let go of my hand and pulled a tissue from her sleeve to wipe her eyes. I reached for it, then passed it along to Lucia.

'If there's such a thing as a heart breaking in joy, that's what I felt," my mum said as we walked out after the service.

"The breaking of the heart is symbolic of all the heartache that's occurred in Germany, and the joy of my heart is that we're still here and that we're going to continue to be here for generations to come.

"Sitting together with you, my daughter and my grand-daughter in a *Shul* in Munich." She brushed her hand against my cheek. "It was indescribable."

The following day the school was closed. We considered going back to *Shul* but decided to spend the day quietly at home. Shortly after midday we heard the news. For at least five minutes a gunman in the east German town of Halle had repeatedly fired his gun at the door of an orthodox synagogue in which 80 Jews were praying. The state of SaxonyAnhalt had declined to provide police protection on the holiest and busiest day of the Jewish year. The heavily reinforced door held firm as the synagogue's director watched from the other side. If the attacker had prevailed, the carnage inside would have been unthinkable. The gunman turned and shot dead two innocent bystanders, a young woman waiting at a bus stop nearby and a man buying lunch in a kebab shop. It took seven minutes for the police to arrive. Five days earlier, just before *Shabbat* service began, a 23-year-old Syrian man wielding a knife rushed at the *Neue* Synagogue on Oranienburgerstrasse in central Berlin shouting "*Allahu Akhbar*", "God is great" in Arabic, and "Fuck Israel". Security guards subdued him with pepper spray until the police arrived. A couple of hours later, he was released.

The day after the attack in Halle, Lotte and Milo went back to school. Their teachers spoke to them about the shooting. Parents exchanged varying degrees of concern on the class WhatsApp group. One of them composed a letter to the police demanding extra support to ensure our children would remain safe. I received an email from the rabbi of

the P-Strasse *Shul* in Berlin expressing his condolences to the victims, together with the wish that German politicians would do more than their usual expression of “solidarity with ‘their Jewish co-citizens’.” In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* I read a message from the chief minister of Bavaria, Markus Söder. Just three weeks earlier he had attended “solidarity prayers” at the school. Now he reiterated his “solidarity with ‘our Jewish co-citizens’.”

My mum was due to fly back to Sydney the following morning. Lucia came over for dinner.

‘How dare he, on *Yom Kippur*? she cried, her eyes afire. “How dare he try to attack one of the synagogues?” I took her shaking hands in mine. They were ice cold.

“I didn’t know she would feel so strongly,” my mum said as we wished each other good night. “She loves coming to *Shabbas* for the family and the food and the warmth, but she hasn’t been to *Shul* for a long time.

“You know I’m not religious,” my mum kissed me on both cheeks, “but I feel so Jewish.

“Tonight I felt such an incredible unity with Lucia – that she understood what we’ve been going through for so long.”

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Friday 11 October, Munich

My bicycle, long since repaired after my fall, waited for me downstairs. My scars would take longer to heal. I lifted my leg over the frame and pushed the pedals towards the sun, my destination unknown. I passed the synagogue on G-strasse where a security guard leant into the window of the police car parked in its designated spot. The trees flashed me their livery of yellow, orange and red. Soon it would all fall to the ground, showing the skeletons that lay beneath.

For now, the light beckoned me on. I crossed intersections, swapped sides of the street. Without meaning to I arrived at Königsplatz. I clutched the handlebars, my bones rattling, as I bounced over cobblestones. When I got to the *Kiez* I jumped off my bike and wheeled it to the *Propylaea*. Under the arches I saw couples dancing in slow motion to a faraway

tune. A pair sitting on the steps read novels in the sunlight. Her pregnant belly fell over the waistband of her jeans. One of his legs was covered with tattoos. As I turned to leave them, I saw the word “Nazis” printed on his black t-shirt in white type. I swung back in alarm and made out the exclamation beneath it: “*Raus*!”

I rode on through traffic, all the way to the square on the other side of town. The portal to the synagogue where a few hours earlier Lotte, Milo and their classmates had said a prayer to Wednesday’s victims was locked shut. Threaded through its brass handles were white roses. On the ground below, more bouquets had been freed from their wrappers and laid down, joining to make a bed of red, orange, yellow and white. On a square of paper somebody had written a single word, “Solidarity”.

Fanning out before the flowers were dozens of candles in glass jars. I thought of the invisible hands that had bent down to light each wick. The wind began to blow, but the flames flickered on.

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